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b. g. gokhale

Samudra Gupta

life and times

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To ATTEMPT a historical biography of any personage relying mainly on scanty numismatic and inscriptional evidence is an extremely difficult task. Dr. Gokhale, however, has succeeded admirably in painting a clear and lucid picture of the life and times of Samudra Gupta in this volume, the first of its kind.

Samudra Gupta was the prime architect of the Gupta Golden Age. During his reign of about twenty-five years, he was able to build up a vast and powerful empire. He was acknowledged as the greatest emperor of his time. Dr. Gokhale gives us an insight into the man: learned, possessed of imagination, an ear for music and a mind for abstruse thought, Samudra Gupta lived, fought and thought in the best traditions of the creative spirit of ancient India.

Apart from presenting in bold relief the main events in the life of Samudra Gupta, the book also spotlights the economic, social, cultural, religious and administrative conditions of the age. There is a detailed description of the administrative organization. Economic conditions are also described, covering in detail such facets of economic life as agriculture, land tenure, feudalism, trade and commerce, taxation and land revenue. Religion is accorded the pride of place in the discussion as this period marked the resurgence of Brahmanism and the growth of the concept of Divine Right of Kings. The brilliant exposition of the society and culture of these times makes the book invaluable to students of history and politics as well as to the general reader.

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Samudra Gupta

LIFE AND TIMES

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Ancient India, History and Culture
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Samudra Gupta

Life and Times

by

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To

THE MARY REYNOLDS BABCOCK FOUNDATION,

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Preface

SAMUDRA GUPTA is one of the outstanding personalities of ancient India. His conquests and achievements in the fields of culture have become almost legendary. The idea of writing a monograph on this fascinating personality was first suggested to me by the late Rev. Fr. H. Heras, S. J. of the Indian Historical Research Institute at St. Xavier's College in Bombay. Fr. Heras encouraged me to gather material on the subject and prepare the first draft of the work.

Many years have passed since then. Teaching, study and travel took much of my time in the interval. But the idea of completing the work could not be brushed aside. During the last year I worked on the old draft, completely revised it and prepared this text for publication which is now being offered to the readers.

Primary material on Samudra Gupta is indeed very scanty and would not exceed more than some fifty lines of Sanskrit composition in inscriptions and on coins. There is some secondary material scattered about in classical Sanskrit literature, in the *Dharmasastras,* the *Puranas* and works on polity. And there exists considerable research material prepared by numerous scholars working in the field of ancient Indian history and culture. But clearly Samudra Gupta has been far less fortunate than an Asoka or a Harsha, not to mention Akbar. There is no single volume study of Samudra Gupta, his life and times and it is hoped that this modest contribution will fill the gap, however inadequately.

The following pages aim at presenting in a somewhat bold relief the main events in the life of Samudra Gupta and the conditions of his age. I felt that I should restrict myself to events and conditions which are directly related to Samudra Gupta rather than attempt to venture out into the broad field of the cultural history of the Guptas. This will be apparent in the very few references to the works of Kalidasa which account for such a formidable body of facts and opinions in any reconstruction dealing

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with the Gupta age. My subject is Samudra Gupta and anything that is not directly connected with him has been, by and large, studiously avoided.

Many are the scholars who have worked in the area of the history of the Imperial Guptas and I have drawn copiously on their findings as will be seen from the footnotes. I am grateful to these savants for their contributions made my work both possible and easy. I have tried to offer some fresh suggestions on some of the still obscure points in the history of the life of Samudra Gupta and their validity must be judged on the evidence adduced in the course of this work. I am grateful to Mr. Charles H. Babcock of the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation of Winston-Salem for his deep interest in the history and culture of India. I am also grateful to Dr. Harold W. Tribble, President and Dr. Edwin G. Wilson, Dean, Wake Forest College for their encouragement to me in my work. I am thankful to Mr. S. D. Gaikwad, my former student and now Tutor in history, Siddharth College of Arts and Science in Bombay for verifying references in works which were unobtainable to me here. Mrs. Harold L. Grogan deserves my warmest thanks for typing the manuscript so carefully and expeditiously. My thanks are also due to Mrs. Thomas E. Mullen of the Wake Forest College Library for preparing the jacket-design. And finally I cannot forget the help and encouragement which my wife, Dr. Beena Gokhale, has given to me by her discussions and criticism and in preparing the index.

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CHAPTER ONE

The Inter-Imperium

(200 B.C. TO 300 A.D.)

THE OPENING decades of the second century B.C. witnessed the passing of the great Maurya empire. While it lasted that empire had succeeded in creating a sense of national unity imposed upon a country of continental dimensions through the establishment of a political system whose influence was felt from Kabul to Mysore and Saurashtra to Bengal. Heir to a political revolution, brought about by the assassination of Dhana Nanda by Chandragupta Maurya in 323 B.C., the empire strove, during the time of Asoka, to bring about a cultural revolution. And in thus trying to place a keystone of morality in an arch of an organization resting on the foundations of force, the Maurya empire tottered to its fall. But the experiment was well worth the effort, for history knows of the rise and fall of many empires but the moral adventure of an Asoka remains unique in the annals of human endeavour. The Maurya empire was a miracle and miracles do not last long. Through it history was trying to outwit geography but the time for that was not yet. A highly centralized empire served by primitive means of communications had to come to terms with its own geography whereby centralization had to yield place to a confederation of more or less autonomous states. In this the empire becomes a prestigous concept and the autonomy of the states remains both real and substantial. But Maurya political thought was far too rigourously logical to suffer such contradictions between imperial intent and regional autonomy. It created a highly centralized bureaucracy to hold together tightly its bundle

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of principalities and regional societies and believed, with Asoka, that this astute combination of military force and bureaucratic despotism could be effectively tempered with an infusion of an ethical discipline of the teachings of Gautama, the Buddha.

But let us look at this imperial experiment of the Mauryas a little more closely. In the fourth century B.C. India was undergoing a vast transformation in its politics and economy. The rise of the Nandas signified the birth of a new imperial tradition as well as a new relation of social forces. The old Kshatriya class of the Epic times was slowly losing ground before the advent of new social classes. The *Puranas* describe the Nandas as contemptible parvenus and credit the first Nanda, Mahapadma, with the destruction of the Kshatriya class.[1] Mahapadma means "great horde" and presumably the name of the first Nanda is really a nickname for his name according to another source was Ugrasena.[2] The list of dynasties overthrown by him is indeed impressive and the wealth of the Nandas is described in almost legendary terms. This combination of military power with substantial economic development resulting in a sizeable accumulation of surplus with the state was a new phenomenon in Indian history. The basis of wealth in the old Vedic society was the possession of numerous heads of cattle. This changed later to land during the Epic times when the king became the greatest land-holder and extravagant claims for land-ownership on behalf of the king were made by the later Brahmanical law-makers. Some of them declared that all land belonged to the king, and such statements then should be taken to indicate the fact that the transition from a predominantly pastoral stage to a predominantly agricultural life had been completed.[3] But around the seventh century B.C. an economic revolution was sweeping over the landscape. This is reflected in the use and spread of coinage practically all over northern India and in the outlying parts nearest to the centres of civilization in the north. The use of coinage is linked to two factors; in the first instance an increasing volume of coins in circulation must be taken as an indication of the easy accessibility of copper and other

[1] Mookerji R. K., *Chandragupta Maurya and His Times*, p. 12.
[2] Majumdar, R.C. & Pusalkar, A.D. (Gen. Edrs.), The History and Culture of the Indian People, ii, *The Age of Imperial Unity*, p. 37.
[3] *Manavadharmasastra*, VIII, 39.

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metals used for coinage and, secondly, it also reflects the growth of trade and commerce. In the Buddhist works the emergent hero is the merchant-banker, the biggest of whom was Anathapindika of Sravasti in Bihar.[4] A charming but highly significant story relates how Anathapindika was able to outbid a Kshatriya prince. It seems that a Prince Jeta owned a plot of ground on which stood a bamboo forest. Anathapindika thought that this plot would make an excellent site for a monastery for the Buddha and asked the Prince about the price of the land. The Prince said that he would take as many pieces of *kahapanas* (square copper coins of the punch-marked variety) as would cover the whole plot of land. Without a second thought the Banker closed the deal and bought the plot with an enormous amount of money. On this ground was later built the Jetavana monastery which the Buddha used many a times as a rain-retreat. Considering the high purchasing power of the *kahapana,* the money expended by Anathapindika for the monastery must be calculated in terms of hundreds of thousands. This story is illustrated on a medallion of the Barhut Stupa railing.[5] It has been pointed out that the rise of Magadhan imperialism was due to the existence and exploitation of sources of metals like copper in Bihar. Magadha, during the time of the Buddha, had already become a centre of extensive trade and there are numerous references to merchants and their guilds in the Buddhist books. Their caravans ranged over vast areas carrying valuable merchandise from one corner of the country to another and helped the process of a mercantilist capital accumulation.[6] This great economic revolution which marked mercantilist activity needed an empire. The existence of many different states riven with mutual jealousy and strife had brought the Kshatriya into prominence. Continuous warfare led to the hardening of the social class devoted to war as an occupation and in the hands of this class was concentrated political power. The existence of continuous war also led to the extensions of the territorial

[4] For an account of the episode of Anathapindika building the Jetavana monastery, *Sacred Books of the East,* XX, p. 187.

[5] See Nilakanta Sastri, *A Comprehensive History of India,* II, "The Mauryas & Satavahanas", p. 687, Plate XII.

[6] Kosambi, D. D., *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History,* p. 147; Majumdar, R. C. and Pusalkar, A. D., *The Age of Imperial Unity,* pp. 601-03.

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limits of kingdoms through annexations and this in turn led to the emergence of the class of bureaucrats. There were thus two new classes thrown up by continual warfare in ancient India. The third new class of merchants and bankers helped in the process of the emergence of imperial trends. It was to the benefit of the merchant to have one government over the major areas of the country for only the existence of an imperial administration could ensure the absence of petty and distracting warfare which so much interfered with trade and commerce in the country.

But the old structure characterized by the existence of numerous states could be destroyed in a decisive way on a national scale only through extensive and continuous conquests by a single dynasty or through a cataclysmic eruption in the form of a foreign invasion or a combination of both these factors. The Nandas had initiated the trend of extensive conquests which resulted in the overthrow of numerous petty and archaic Kshatriya dynasties. The invasion of northern India by Alexander the Great, represented the other essential factor in the growth of a national empire in India.

In 330 B.C. Alexandar of Macedon overthrew the Achamenid empire so laboriously built by the efforts of conquerors like Darius the Great. When he set on fire the capital of Persepolis he consigned to its flames the Persian ambitions of holding half the world in fief. From the capital he began to march to the eastern and north-eastern provinces of the Persian empire securing his communications by planting a number of cities along the way. By 327 B.C. Bactria was in his hands and in May of that year he began his advance into India. Doggedly his troops fought against determined and heroic resistance by the Republican states of the area and the climax of the campaign came when Porus, who ruled over the tract between the rivers Jhelum and Chenab, was defeated by the superior forces and strategy of the Macedonian conqueror. Alexander then marched on to the Beas and at the end of July 326 his victorous march was stopped by the refusal of his troops to campaign any farther. With a heavy heart Alexander gathered his army and began the march back and by September 325 he was out of India. Two years later he died in Babylon.

Alexander had come and gone. His invasion of northern India

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was a spectacular feat of inspired leadership and rare military skill. But what was the real significance of this Macedonian raid in the history of India? Politically it was like a storm that pulls down trees and leaves rubble behind. It destroyed the small kingdoms and petty principalities that dotted the landscape of the area where his campaigns were fought. And this created a vacuum into which an empire could rise on the broken fragments of an earlier political structure. This was the empire of Chandragupta Maurya.

II

Though Chandragupta Maurya figures as the first "historical" emperor of India, the story of his birth and his adventures before his rise to imperial stature is still shrouded in a mass of legends and stories. Certain passages in Sanskrit texts like the drama *Mudrarakshasa* and the *Puranas* were taken to imply that his social origin was rather non-descript but this theory has now been given up. The Buddhist works mention him as a scion of the Moriya clan and refer to him as a kshatriya. His father was a petty chieftain who was killed in a war and Chandragupta was brought up in a forest where he met the Brahmana Chanakya or Kautilya who had him educated in Taxila, then the most outstanding seat of learning in India. While in Taxila Chandragupta was a witness to the Greek Invasion and must have drawn appropriate conclusions of his own from the encounter between the Hellenes and Indians. He made an adroit use of the destruction of centres of the power of the republican tribes and probably gathered his army from the remnants of the defunct tribal states and kingdoms. With the aid of this army he attacked the last of the Nandas, Dhanananda, in Pataliputra, assassinated the Nanda emperor and became the ruler of the large Nanda empire. The event is placed in 323 B.C.[7]

Chandragupta added large areas to his empire as a result of his war against Seleucos Nicator in 305-304 B.C. These included parts of Afghanistan, Baluchistan and the Punjab. There is evi-

[7] Nilakanta Sastri, *Op. Cit.*, p. 5. Other authorities give 322 B.C. as the date of the dynastic revolution. See Smith, V.A., *Early History of India*, p. 110; Mookerji, *Chandragupta Maurya and His Times*, p. 72.

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dence of the extension of his empire in the Saurashtra Peninsula and in the Bombay region. His sway also extended to the south if we believe the Tamil tradition that the Nanda empire included parts of India south of the Vindhya mountains.[8]

Tradition has it that in this grand venture of creating a national empire Chandragupta was aided by a Brahmana called Kautilya, the reputed author of the treatise on polity called *Arthasastra*. This work is generally assigned to the Maurya period and in spite of dissenting views it is reasonable to hold that parts of it were certainly the work of the Maurya philosopher and guide.[9] The work clearly reflects the prevailing political temper which rejected anti-monarchical tendencies inherent in the statecraft of a republican polity and emphasized the virtue of a big state.[10] The Mauryan state was served by a bureaucracy that was as powerful as it was ubiquitous and its economic policies were such as to control, if not actively discourage, business enterprise on a large scale. The *Arthasastra* reveals a suspicion of the guilds and suggests state control over practically all significant economic activity. The Republican states disappear from the political landscape and it is only after the decline of the Mauryas that they make their appearance in numismatic evidence once again. There is the frank admission that force was the basis of the power of the state and this force was to operate as much in political as in economic areas. The elimination of the regional powers led to the creation of a centralized state that was served by a very

[8] The most comprehensive and authoritative work on Chandragupta Maurya is by Mookerji, R.K., *Chandragupta Maurya and His Times*, Madras, 1943; the accounts presented in the work edited by Nilakanta Sastri, *Op. Cit.*, and Majumdar, R. C. and Pusalkar, A. D., *The Age of Imperial Unity*, Vol. II of Bombay Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan's History of India Series entitled *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, represent the consensus of scholarly opinion on the subject to date.

[9] *Arthasastra* of Kautilya, edited by R. Shamasastry, translated by R. Shamasastry, p. V; for the view that the text belongs to the third century A.D., see Jolly, J., *Arthasastra of Kautilya* (or Kautalya) ed. by Jolly, J. and Schmidt, R., Introduction, p. 5, but see Jayaswal, K. P., *Hindu Polity*, who argues that the work may date back to the fourth century B.C. (Appendix C).

[10] For a comprehensive discussion on the political ideas of the *Arthasastra* see Ghoshal, U.N., *A History of Indian Political Ideas*, Bombay, 1959, Part IV, Chapters VI and VII, pp. 116-55.

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efficient bureaucracy, including a complicated system of spies and reporters, and a numerous army that could not only bring about a dynastic revolution and create an empire of continental dimensions, but also fight aggression from without. What Chandragupta set up, therefore, was a great organization of force which spelled conditions of security and peace leading to a measure of material abundance scarcely known before its time.

The career of Bindusara (299-274 B.C.) was an effort at continuation and consolidation of the vast imperial structure built by Chandragupta. It has been suggested that Bindusara was also a conqueror in his own right though it is difficult to say what he precisely conquered. And then came Asoka whose reign of over forty years saw a transformation in the very character of the Maurya empire. Asoka fought but one war which resulted in the conquest of Kalinga (parts of the modern state of Orissa and the Ganjam district of Andhra Pradesh). Assuming that the formal coronation of Asoka was delayed for a period of four years, that is until 268 B.C., the date of the Kalinga war may be placed around 260 B.C. This solitary war was a turning point in the career of Asoka. It crushed a rebellion but the victory was at best phyrric. The countless dead on the field of battle mocked at the king's victorious armour and from the dead a new king was born. From that point onwards Asoka changed the policy of the empire and substituted morality for force as the cement that could hold the structure together. He embarked on a policy of numerous public works of great benefit to traders and travellers, a policy of conciliation towards the tribal societies that nestled uncomfortably within the capacious confines of the great empire and on its borders, and an attitude of lively interest in the ethical and ecclesiastical precepts and practices of Buddhism. Though his personal faith was Buddhism Asoka preached a universal morality that would bind together, rather than divide in sectarian disputes, the teeming population of the Maurya empire. His whole life was an essay in earnest effort that strove to lend a moral glow to imperial greatness and when he died in 232 B.C. Asoka had no regrets.[11]

[11] Perhaps the best account of Asoka and his faith and acts is found in D. R. Bhandarkar's *Asoka* (Calcutta, 1925); Radha Kumud Mookerji's *Asoka* (London, 1928) is also profitable reading; a summary of work

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What Asoka had attempted was nothing less than a transformation in the character of an empire. The Maurya empire began as an organization of power on a continental scale. Chandragupta Maurya's administration and armed forces were instruments of welding this empire through coercion and military force. But obviously, these were not enough. The Mauryas had the all too human desire to ensure that the empire should last as long as the "Sun and the Moon".[12] For this, so believed Asoka, the empire must rest on righteousness, for force, however mighty it may prove in certain situations, creates its own antithesis whereas righteousness, being its own reward, is everlasting. Asoka believed that he was the embodiment of the General Will for righteousness and interpreted his position in paternal terms.[13] His main problem was twofold. One aspect of it concerned the stabilization of the imperial frontiers which involved the war of Kalinga. The second aspect was that of internal consolidation. This required the elimination of religious differences erupting into strife and this he aimed at achieving through his policy of religious toleration and impartial patronage to all sects.[14] It was also necessary to create for the vast empire a common ethical creed transcending the barriers of theological dogmas and sectarian philosophies. To do this he utilized the ethical teaching of Gautama, the Buddha, with its emphasis on spiritual values and non-violence. The Maurya empire had disarmed vast sections of population, a trend which was already in existence through the operation of the rules of the incipient caste system whereby the only class that could legally and legitimately bear arms was the class of the Kshatriyas. He tried to win over the Brahmanical priesthood with his exhortations to his people to respect them. He attempted to win the favour of the Jainas and Ajivikas by calling for respect for the Sramanas and Nigranthas, and giving them the benefits of his imperial patronage. The Maurya empire had already helped the Shudras by pursuing a policy of colonizing new tracts with selected Shudra families.[15] The paramount need, however, was for the liberaliza-

done on Asoka is given in Romilla Thapar's *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (London, 1960).

[12] *Delhi-Topra Pillar Edict.* Line 10.

[13] See *Second Separate Kalinga Edict.*

[14] *Rock Edict,* VII, Lines 1 and 2. [15] *Arthasastra,* II, I.

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tion of the imperial administration in such a way that it reflected and implemented a humanistic spirit. Various orders were issued for this purpose and to ensure that these were observed by the bureaucrats a system of periodical inspections was introduced.[16] Asoka seriously attempted to establish a welfare state based on principles of righteousness by initiating a number of public works like highway construction, planting of shade-giving trees, digging of wells and planting of medicinal herbs and, most interesting and important of all, the establishment of hospitals for men and animals.[17]

When Asoka died the Maurya empire was at the height of its prosperity and power. The *Puranas* state that the Mauryas ruled for 137 years. If it is assumed that the Maurya dynasty came into existence in 323 B.C. the end of the dynasty may be placed around 186 B.C. [18] Assuming for the sake of argument that the period of 137 years as given by the *Puranas* as the duration of the dynasty is correct, the first three kings account for some eighty-seven years. That leaves a bare half century between the death of Asoka and the end of his House. And during this period we are told that as many as nine kings ruled. Even if allowances are made for confusion in the kings-list and the list is reduced to seven kings, the period allotted to each ranges from thirteen to seven years. This intriguing fact has exercised the thoughts of many historians about the causes of the decline and disintegration of the Mauryas and it will be pertinent here to consider these causes.

The first fact that strikes us is the extremely short periods for which the successors of Asoka seem to have ruled. This admits of only one explanation and that is these successors must have been particularly weak and incompetent rulers incapable of maintaining their right to rule to the end of the span of their natural life. It is generally accepted that Asoka's accession was involved in a long dispute and the same possibility may, therefore, not be altogether ruled out in the case of his successors. Such wars of succession, if they took place at all, would naturally create fac-

[16] *Rock Edict*, III. [17] *Rock Edict*, II.

[18] Pargiter, *Dynasties of the Kali Age*, pp. 28-29. But for variant dates for the beginning and end of the Maurya dynasty see footnote 7 above. Also See R. Thapar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 196 for 180-181 B.C. as the date of the end of the dynasty.

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tions and these would inevitably reduce the efficiency and power of the empire. Disturbed reigns after Asoka may, therefore, be assumed to be a major factor in the weakening of the imperial structure.

We may also consider the possibility of internal splits and disturbances. The Maurya bureaucracy was reputedly harsh. An instance of a revolt against the administration in the far northwest is reported by the *Divyavadana* which tells us that Bindusara sent his son Asoka to quell a rebellion at Taxila. When Asoka went there the people said that they were not against the emperor but could suffer no longer the tyranny of the wicked ministers.[19] Asoka's officers were in charge of hundreds of thousands of people and were vested with vast powers over the life and liberty of citizens. To check abuses of such power Asoka, as mentioned earlier, ordered periodical administrative inspections. If the possibility of abuse of official power could exist during the life time of an enlightened and great emperor like Asoka such possibilities must be regarded as even greater during the times of his weak successors. Administrative tyranny, then, may be regarded as another factor in the decline of the empire.

The economic consequences of the Maurya empire must also be duly considered. The Magadhan empire of the Nandas rode to prosperity on the crest of the wave of mercantilist activity preceding the birth of that empire. The Buddhist literature is replete with references to merchants, bankers and their guilds.[20] Though the *Arthasastra* does not deliberately suggest policies for the destruction of trade and commerce and of the guilds themselves, the various measures of state control, policies of colonization and taxation of commodities must have resulted in a serious restriction of commodity production and its exchange.[21] The numerous taxes mentioned in the *Arthasastra* reveal a policy of rigid control of production and distribution of commodities and these policies, when implemented, must have brought about a dimunition in the

[19] See Przyluski, *La Legende de L'Empeear Acoka*, p. 232.

[20] The only complete work on the subject of the guild system of ancient India is R. C. Majumdar's *Corporate Life in Ancient India*, which treats of the formation, development and organization of guilds of various kinds.

[21] See Kosambi, D.D., *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, pp. 220-22.

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volume of wealth in private hands. The Mauryas maintained large armies and a rich court life. All these were paid for out of the taxes collected from the productive sections of the population and as time passed the economic costs of the great empire must have risen and become almost a burden on the people. The state apparatus could be run and controlled in its loyalty and efficiency only when the Emperor possessed the requisite strength of personality and character. When these declined the apparatus became both inefficient and costly.

Many writers have ascribed the decline of the Mauryas to the religious policies of Asoka and a theory of Brahmanical counter-revolution led by Pushyamitra Shunga, who assassinated the last Maurya, Brihadratha, around 186 B.C., has also been advanced.[22] While it cannot be denied that Asoka preached respect for Brahmanas and Sramanas, his other actions like prohibition of animal sacrifices, discontinuation of popular fairs and religious festivities and the policy of *dandasamata* and *vyavaharasamata* (equality in punishment and procedure) did adversely affect the position of the Brahmana priesthood. This priesthood naturally harboured resentment against the Mauryas and when the opportunity arrived, by which the Brahman Pushyamitra assassinated Brihadratha Maurya, they heartily supported that dynastic revolution.[23] And hence though the destruction of the Maurya empire cannot be attributed entirely to the Brahmanical reaction it cannot also be ruled out as a factor contributing to the complex process of the disintegration of an empire.

At this point it is pertinent to consider two inter-connected processes. These are the role of foreign invasions in the history of India and the dynamics of Indian empires. When examined in this context we find that almost all empires have foreign invasions preceding them and also appearing at the time of their decline. The Maurya empire was preceded by the Macedonian Invasion led by Alexander the Great (327-325 B.C.). In the second century B.C. there was another Greek invasion led by Demetrius and

[22] See Bhandarkar, *Asoka*, p. 237; Jayaswal, K. P., *Journal of the Bihar Research Society*, II, p. 8; Raychoudhuri, H. C., *Political History of Ancient India*, p. 304

[23] For a detailed discussion of the Brahmanical reaction to Maurya rule and Buddhism see the author's *Buddhism and Asoka*, pp. 143 ff.

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Menander. And this was precisely the time when the Maurya empire began its last phase. Before the establishment of the Gupta empire in the fourth century A.D., India was subjected to a series of foreign incursions by the Scythians and the Yueh Chi. In the fifth and sixth centuries A.D., at the time when the Gupta empire began to decline there were the Hun invasions. The establishment of the Mughal empire was in itself a product of a foreign invasion, that by the Chugtai Mughals themselves. Through the early part of the eighteenth century when the Mughal decline began there had preceded the economic and political advances of the English and the French in various parts of India. And there were the invasions by Nadir Shah, the Persian (1738-1739) and Ahmad Shah Abdali, the Afghan (1748-1767). Then came the establishment of the British empire in the early nineteenth century and this empire had to contend against a Japanese invasion (1940-1945) in Asia which hastened its disintegration resulting in the rise of the present Indian Republic in 1947-1950. In this context, then, foreign invasions have been somewhat of a concomitant and decisive factor at the birth of new states and also at their disintegration.

Let us now consider the dynamics of Indian empires. Every empire arises on the debris of regional states and principalities which are expressions of the regional factor in the history of India. The regions are united into an imperial framework for a time and then once again the empire begins to disintegrate and the regional political societies reemerge from this hibernation. The imperial period, therefore, does not show a complete destruction of the regional political societies but only their partial neutralization and retreat into a hibernation awating to emerge after a time. It appears that this period of hibernation lasts about a century and half. The Maurya empire began in 323 and ended in 186 B.C., that is about a century and half. The Gupta empire began in 320 A.D. and was on the decline by 475 A.D. This is a little over a century and half. The Mughal empire was really established by 1560 and was in its final phase of existence by 1720 which gives us a period of some 160 years. The British empire properly began its career by 1818 and ended by 1947 which is a little over a century and quarter. Seen in this light, then, it seems that the average life-span of an Indian empire ranges between 125 to 160

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years. Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406 A.D.), the celebrated Arab philosopher, puts forward a theory of political cycles. Such a cycle comprises five stages, namely, conquest, building up of the dynasty, attainment of the peak, decline, and finally fall. He attributes 120 years as a normal period for a cycle with three generations of forty years in each cycle.[24] Without necessarily subscribing to the organic theory of empires it is obvious that the dynamics of an empire conditions its phases marking the beginning, wherein there exists a situation which is ready for the setting up of an empire, a peak period when the empire is about to fulfil its historic tasks and decline and fall when the situation is changed so radically as to make the empire incapable of holding its framework together. The Maurya empire passed through all these phases and began to decline soon after the passing away of the great Asoka. The regional political societies began to assert themselves and the rise of kingdoms like that of the Satavahanas indicated the collapse of the Maurya empire. Finally a dynastic revolution and foreign invasions delivered the deathblows and the great empire became a memory of the past.

III

The leader of the *coup d'état* was a Brahmana called Pushyamitra Shunga. He was a general of the last Maurya and using an army review as a setting for his revolution killed Brihadratha Maurya and declared himself master of all that remained of the once vast Maurya empire.[25] Pushyamitra is well known for the performance of two horse scarifices, presumably in the same capital of Pataliputra from where in an earlier age Asoka had banned all sacrificial slaughter. These sacrifices were an indication of changed religious and political conditions. They marked a resurgence of Vedic rites, a re-emergence of Brahmanism and the political alliance of the Brahmana priesthood and the state. It is assumed that the great Epics (*Ramayana and Mahabharata*) were Brahmanized in this age as was the Law Code of Manu. Buddhist works allude

[24] Rosenthal, Franz (Trans.), *Ibn Khaldun, the Muquddimah*, i, pp. 71, 115, *et seq.*

[25] The event is reported by Bana in his *Harhsacharita* (translated by Cowell and Thomas), p. 193.

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to persecution of Buddhism by Pushyamitra though this is questioned as to its validity by some authors.[26] The Shungas ruled from *Ca.* 184 B.C. to 72 B.C. and were replaced by another Brahmana dynasty, that of the Kanvas whose rule ended in 27 B.C.

The period of the Shungas and the Kanvas witnessed the growth of a multiplicity of states in northern India. The Satavahanas (*Ca.* 235 B.C. to 250 A.D.) created a veritable empire for themselves in the Deccan and the north-western and western parts of the country were convulsed by incursions of foreign hordes like the Scythians and the Yueh Chi who followed closely on the heels of the Bactrians. The Greek invasions had begun in the time of Pushyamitra Shunga. Soon after the death of Alexander the Great in 323 there occurred the partitioning of his vast empire with the eastern part under Seleucos and the western held by Antigonus, the two outstanding generals of Alexander. After the initial conflict Seleucos established himself at Babylon in 312 B.C. By 305 B.C. his empire touched the frontiers of India and that is where he came into conflict with Chandragupta Maurya to whom he ceded four satrapies and received 500 war elephants and there is also an implication that the alliance was cemented with marriage between a daughter of Seleucos and Chandragupta Maurya.[27] In 293 B.C. Antiochus I became a joint king with his father Seleucos. The Seleucids maintained friendly relations with India until 206 when Antiochus III (223-187 B.C.) led an expedition against north-western India. An independent Hellenistic kingdom was founded by Diodotus I. His son and successor Diodotus II was overthrown by Euthydemus who was besieged by Antiochus III in his capital at Balkh (*Ca.* 208 B.C.). However, Antiochus III being pressed by events in the western parts of his empire, came to terms with Euthydemus permitting him the use of the royal title. Demetrius, the son of Euthydemus, crossed the Hindu Kush mountains and attacked a king called Subhagasena

[26] A horse scarifice is referred to in Kalidasa's *Malavikagnimitram*, Act. V; Patanjali in his *Mahabhashya* also refers to a sacrifice, III, II, 111; also see Bhandarkar, R. G., *Collected Works*, I, p. 109; the second sacrifice is alluded to in an inscription from Ayodhya, Jayaswal, *JBORS*, Sept. 1924, pp. 202-03; for views of persecution of Buddhists see Ghosh, *Law Commemoration Volume*, pp. 215-16.

[27] See Nilakanta Sastri, K. A. (Ed.), *A Comprehensive History of India*, II, The Mauryas and Satavahanas, pp. 7-8.

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and later advanced through the Punjab to Saketa and Madhyamika and possibly even occupied the capital Pataliputra for a very brief period. In this he was assisted by Menander who figures as the King Milinda of the Pali text *Milindapanha* or the Questions of King Milinda. Demetrius' campaign, however, proved to be a mere raid, for he had to hurry back to Bactria to quell threatened revolts. The Indian invasion of Demetrius may be dated during the early part of the career of Pushyamitra Shunga. Menander ruled in the Punjab from his capital at Sagala (Sialkot) and Buddhist tradition asserts that he was very much interested in Buddhism.[28] Menander's reign is placed between 155-145 B.C.

The Greek invasions accelerated the process of the disintegration of the Maurya empire and saw the establishment of Greek rule in the Punjab and the north-western areas. On the ruins of the Maurya empire rose three kingdoms. One of these was that of the Shungas who were followed by the Kanvas in Magadha. The other was that of the Jaina king Kharavela who ruled in Orissa and extended his sway at the expense of the Shungas. The third great kingdom was that of the Satavahanas in the Deccan. Besides these there were numerous petty principalities and tribal republics ruling either as feudatories of the great kingdoms or independently of them. The pattern of imperial rule was now replaced by the emergence of the regional political and cultural societies with foreign groups like the Greeks, the Scythians and the Yueh-Chi hovering around the northern and north-western fringes of the subcontinent. The political impact of Greek rule in India was marginal though there were more lasting effects in the area of cultural life.

IV

The chronicle of the period of the inter-imperium is largely filled with the activities of large kingdoms pretending to be empires and petty republics and principalities holding sway over diverse regions. The vacuum left behind by the fall of the Maurya empire was attempted to be filled also by foreign rulers. The Greeks ruled in the Punjab until the end of the first century B.C. The Scythians destroyed Greek suzerainty over Bactria and began to

[28] *Ibid.*, pp. 152-75.

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stream into India. The Scythians or Sakas, as they are known in Indian literature, are first mentioned in the inscriptions of the Persian Emperor Darius I and come into prominence in the history of India in the first century B.C. where they appear for the first time in the north-western areas and in the Punjab. Originally the Sakas lived in the region of Middle Asia between the Syr Darya and Sogdiana and were forced to migrate under the pressure of the Central Asian Yueh Chi. The earliest Saka king is Maues who is placed between 20 B.C. and 22 A.D. They often came into conflict with the Parthians whose king Gondophernes is so well-known to Christian Tradition as the king to whose court went the Apostle Saint Thomas in 29 or 33 A.D. In course of time the Sakas established five satrapal families ruling from Taxila, Mathura, Ujjain, Junnar and Gujarat. The Western Kshatrapas, as the Saka rulers in Western India were known, incessantly fought with the Satavahanas of the Deccan and were also attacked by local powers like the Yaudheyas. Soon after their advent into India the Sakas were rapidly Indianized and completely assimilated by the stream of Indian culture.[29]

The Kshatrapas of northern India were overpowered by the Kushans. Known as the Yueh-Chi to Chinese historians, the Kushans lived in Central Asia from where they were expelled by the Hiung-Nu. Migrating westwards the Kushans fought the Sakas and were further pressed by the Wu-Sun. The first Kushana king of note is Kadphises I (15-65 A.D.). His son was Kadphises II, the Wema, who extended the Kushan power into India by his conquests of Northern India. With his successor Kanishka the Kushan power developed into a vast empire stretching from Bihar in the east to Khorasan in the west and from Khotan in the north to the Konkan in the south. Kanishka is well-known as a patron of Buddhism and it was at this time that Mahayana Buddhism comes into prominence and almost displaces the orthodox form of Buddhism, Theravada or Hinayana, from many areas in northern India. Kanishka probably ruled from 78-102 A.D. His empire began to decline soon after his death and through the succeeding centuries the Kushans ruled as minor states until the

[29] The most recent account of the Greeks in India is by Narain, A. K., *The Indo-Greeks;* for the Scythians in India see Lohuizen de Leeuw, J. E. Van, *The Scythian Period.*

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third century A.D. when their power was attacked by tribal republic like those of the Yaudheyas and the Arjunayanas.[30] By 100 A.D. thus, Magadha, the heartland of early Indian empires became a part of the empire of the Kushans whose centre lay on the frontiers of the country. Beyond the Kushan sphere lay the Sassanid empire stretching into Seistan and Central Asia and occasionally exerting expansive pressure on the Indian borders. The Saka-Kshatrapas exercised suzerainty in western and central India as feudatories of the Kushans and on their decline ruled independently. The later Kushans and Sakas were ringed around by tribal states the names of some of which are mentioned in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudra Gupta. These tribal republics played a significant role in the destruction of Kushana and Saka power. These tribes were the Malavas, the Arjunayanas, Yaudheyas, Madrakas, Abhiras, Prarjunas, Sanakanikas, Kakas and Kharaparikas.

Of these the Malavas were a well-known tribe since ancient times. They were first settled in the Punjab but later migrated and settled in Rajputana, central India and parts of the modern state of Uttar Pradesh.[31] The Greek historians refer to them as the Malloi and locate them in lower Punjab. At the time of Alexander's invasion they had occupied the Ravi-Sutlaj Doab. But from the second to the fourth century A.D. the provenance and epigraphy of their coins indicate that they occupied a limited area in Rajputana.[32] Battling against the Saka and Kushana domination they made an unsuccessful bid for independence. Once again in *Ca.* 225 A.D. they revolted and declared themselves an independent republic which existed upto the time of Samudra Gupta.[33] The capital of their tribal republic seems to have been Nagari.[34] The Arjunayanas were located in the immediate neighbourhood of the territories of the Malavas. The homelands of the Arjunayanas and the Prarjunas lay within the Delhi-Jaipur-Agra tri-

[30] Nilakanta Sastri, *Op. Cit.*, Chap. VIII.

[31] Law, B. C., *Tribes in Ancient India*, pp. 60-65.

[32] Allan, J., "Ancient India", *Catalogue of Indian Coins*, p. CVII.

[33] Majumdar, R. C. and Altekar, A. S. (Edrs.), "The Vakataka-Gupta Age", *A New History of the Indian People*, VI, p. 34.

[34] Buddha Prakash, "The Political Geography of India on the Eve of Gupta Ascendency", *Indian Culture*, p. 86.

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angle.[35] Closely associated with the Arjunayanas by descent and habitat were the Yaudheyas.[36] On numismatic evidence of the period under discussion they seemed to be settled in eastern Punjab.[37] The credit of delivering the first blow to the Kushan empire goes to the Yaudheyas. Around 145 A.D. they declared themselves independent in north-eastern Rajputana. But this attempt of theirs was checked by the Mahakshatrapa Rudradaman. Towards the end of the second century A.D., however, they made another, and this time successful, bid for independence. This event was celebrated with the issuance of a new currency now occasionally found in the districts of Sahranpur, Dehra Dun, Delhi, Rohtak, Ludhiana and Kangra, areas which comprised the homeland of the Yaudheyas. They are identified with the Johiya Rajputs of Johiyabar living in Bijaygadh region of the Bharatpur state.[38]

The Abhiras dominated the west and south-west areas. The *Purana* texts associate the Abhiras with Saurashtra and Avanti.[39] The Abhiras have been well-known since epic times as a martial tribe. With the establishment of Saka hegemony in western India they became Saka feudatories and the names of two Abhira generals, Rudrabhuti and Ishwaradatta are known from the sources of Saka history. But the Abhiras were not confined to western India for their distinct traces are found in the present day Ahirs living in areas of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Nepal and Rajasthan. The Abhiras were also ruling in parts of northern Konkan and Maharashtra in the third century A.D.[40]

In the central areas ruled the Vakatakas with their capital at Purika. The dynasty was founded by Vindhyshakti who was probably a Satavahana officer in Berar. Vindhyashakti's son and successor, Pravarasena I (*Ca.* 275-335 A.D.) transformed his small patrimony into a sizeable kingdom comprising northern Maharashtra, Berar, parts of Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. This was accomplished by a series of wars the successful termination of which was marked by the performance of horse

[35] Allan, *Op. Cit.*, p. LXXXIII.

[36] The *Mahabharata* (95, 75) describes the Yaudheyas and the Arjunayanas as descendants of Arjuna and Dharma.

[37] Allan, *Op. Cit.*, p. CII.

[38] Majumdar and Altekar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 28.

[39] Pargiter, *Dynasties of the Kali Age*, p. 53.

[40] See Majumdar and Altekar, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 48-51.

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sacrifices. The rise of Samudra Gupta considerably eclipsed the greatness of the Vakatakas though the Gupta empire did not affect the independent status of the Vakatakas who continued to be an important power during the time of Chandra Gupta II, the son and successor of Samudra Gupta. Chandra Gupta's daughter, Prabhavati Gupta, was married to the Vakataka ruler, Rudra Sena II (*Ca.* 385-390 A.D.).[41]

To the immediate south of the Vakataka kingdom lay the kingdom of the Salankayanas of Vengi. Ptolemy (140 A.D.) in his Geography refers to a people called the Salakenoi who are identified with the Salankayanas of Vengi.[42] The Salankayanas were the contemporaries of the early Imperial Guptas (320-467 A.D.). Their capital Vengi has been identified with Peddavegi near Ellora in the Godavari District of Andhra Pradesh. The founder of the dynasty was Vijayadevavarman who successfully challenged the suzerainty of the Ananda kings ruling over the Guntur district and established his own independence. This new kingdom was bounded by the kingdom of the Vakatakas in north, that of the Pallavas in south and by the Kadambas in the west. The contemporary of Samudra Gupta was Hastivarman (*Ca.* 335-350 A.D.) who was defeated by the Gupta conqueror in the course of his south Indian expedition.[43]

The Pallavas were the dominant power in the Tamil country. Ruling from their capital of Kanchipuram the Pallavas expanded their power throughout the south and became the counterparts of the Imperial Guptas in the north. It was once argued that they were of Parthian extraction but this theory is now abandoned in favour of one of an indigenous origin. The earliest known king of the Pallava dynasty was Bappadeva whose successor Sivaskandavarman was responsible for the extension of the territorial limits of the kingdom. Under him the Pallava kingdom extended as far as the south Pennar and in the south it included the Telugu districts between the Godavari and the Krishna.[44] Vishnugopa, the Pallava king ruling in the middle of the fourth century A.D., was the contemporary of Samudra Gupta.

[41] *Ibid.*, pp. 96-111.
[42] Raychoudhuri, H. C., *Op. Cit.*, p. 419, note 1.
[43] Krishnarao, B. V., *Early Dynasties of Andhradesa*, pp. 357-358.
[44] Gopalan, R., *History of the Pallavas of Kanchi*, p. 37.

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In areas of the south-western seaboard ruled the Kadambas. The dynasty was founded by a Brahmana called Mayurasharman who rebelled against the rule of the Pallavas of Kanchi and founded his independent kingdom at Sriparvata in the Karnul district in Andhra Pradesh. This was in the middle of the fourth century A.D. and it is possible that the establishment of the new state of the Kadambas may have been facilitated by the political confusion created by Samudra Gupta's southern campaign. The greatest of the Kadamba kings was Kakusthavarman whose daughter was married to a Gupta prince.[45]

The other powers of considerable importance in the history of the period immediately preceding the rise of the imperial Guptas were the Nagas and the Licchavis. The Nagas were a well-known tribe since ancient times. In the fourth century A.D. there were ruling two Naga dynasties at Padmavati in Madhya Pradesh and Mathura in Uttar Pradesh. K. P. Jayaswal argued that the Bharasivas of the inscriptions of this time and the Nagas mentioned by the *Purana* texts were identical and that these Bharasiva-Nagas were the founders of a new tradition of Hindu freedom and sovereignty. He says further: "The national law-book, the *Manava-dharma-Sastra,* had laid down that Aryavarta was the God-given land of the Aryas and that the *Mlechchhas* must live beyond that and outside. This was their political and international birth right, prescribed by the sacred law of the land. It had to be vindicated. The tradition initiated by the Bharasivas was kept up by the Vakatakas and was taken over by the Guptas and fully maintained by the subsequent emperors from Chandra Gupta Vikramaditya to Baladitya. If there had been no Bharasivas there would not have come into existence a Gupta empire and the Gupta Vikramaditya."[46] But this lofty claim has been effectively questioned on the ground that there is no significant evidence to show that the Bharasivas were leaders of a movement for national emancipation from foreign rule. The Bharasivas performed horse sacrifices but such performances were mere ritual observances in many cases and could not be taken as decisive evidence of wide conquests. The real credit for the weakening of the Kushan-Saka

[45] The most comprehensive work on Kadamba History is G. M. Moraes' *Kadambakula.*

[46] *History of India,* p. 8.

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empire must go to the republican tribes like the Malavas and Yaudheyas, Arjunayanas and Abhiras. The Nagas were, no doubt, an important power during the early days of Gupta rule but much of this power was subsequently crippled by the onslaughts of Samudra Gupta.

In north Bihar lived the Licchavis who are first noticed in the Pali Buddhist literature. They were a republican tribe with their base at Vaishali on the river Gandak. Their activities and role in the formation of the Gupta empire will be discussed presently.

And finally there were the Guptas destined to rise into imperial prominence through the conquests of Samudra Gupta, the subject of the present work.

The pattern of power in the last quarter of the third century A.D. was somewhat as follows: In the far northwest were the Sassanids and the remnants of Kushan empire. On their borders on the south were the tribal republics of the Madrakas, Yaudheyas, Malavas, Arjunayanas, Prarjunas. In central India there were the other tribal republics of the Sanakanikas, Kakas and Kharaparikas. In these areas too were the Naga kingdoms and to the south lay the kingdoms of the Vakatakas, Salankayanas and in the far south ruled the Pallavas. In the west the Sakas held on to their power which was repeatedly challenged by the tribal peoples. The north Bihar and in the foothills of the Himalayas lived the Licchavis with the Guptas as their neighbours. In the north-east there was the kingdom of Kamarupa.

The period of the inter-imperium is marked by the growth of small kingdoms on the one hand the re-emergence of tribal polity on the other. It is noteworthy to remember that the tribal republics existed before the rise of the Maurya empire and re-emerged after the fall of the empire. There are large numbers of coins of the tribes of the period—of the inter-imperium found over widely scattered areas. The decline of the Mauryas gave the old tribes an opportunity to reassert their independence which was extinguished by the Maurya empire. These republics continuously fought against Kushan and Saka domination and thus paved the way for the rise of a new empire. We may also note the emergence of new social elements in positions of power replacing the ancient Kshatriya families. Quite a few of them like the Kadambas and Vakatakas belonged to the Brahmana caste whereas the Pal-

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lavas, Nagas and others were new entrants on the social scene. There is also the rather curious phenomenon of the hardening of the caste system on the one hand and the inclusion of newer tribal groups into the structure of the caste system on the other. The village is now stabilized as a unit of production all over the northern areas and this has some very far-reaching consequences for the economic life of the country as a whole. The political conditions with the absence of a strong central power present a picture of fragmentation and the rule of regional political societies. There is felt the need for the rise of an organization of conquest and commerce and this is fulfilled by the Guptas.

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CHAPTER TWO

Prelude to Greatness

IN THE opening decades of the fourth century A.D. there ruled a king called Chandra Gupta. His kingdom comprised areas of north and east Bengal and had nothing about it that would characterize it as great. But within a few decades that kingdom became the basis of a vast empire and the family was raised to an imperial stature. The Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudra Gupta is an outstanding document of ancient Indian history in many ways. It is inscribed on the same pillar on which the great Asoka, centuries before, had his message of peace and righteousness carved. The difference between the two inscriptions on the same pillar separated by the passage of centuries not only pertains to their contents and their spirit but also applies, in an equally striking manner, to the language too. Asoka's inscription is in Prakrit which has a folksy tone and a racy rhythm; Samudra Gupta's inscription is in classical Sanskrit with its own elegance and mellifluity, cultivated grace and learned tones. The two inscriptions reveal two aspects of Indian history. One concerns the unceasing pursuit of moral grandeur while the other looks at us through its face of war and conquest.

Samudra Gupta's Allahabad Pillar Inscription gives us information on the Gupta family to which he brought such splendour. Samudra Gupta is described as "the son of the son's son of the Maharaj, the Illustrious Gupta; who was the son's son of the Maharaja, the illustrious Ghatotkacha; who was the son of the Maharajadhiraja, the glorious Chandra Gupta (I), (and) the daughter's son of Licchavi, begotten on the Mahadevi Kumara-

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devi".[1] From this it appears that the founder of the dynasty was the Maharaja Sri Gupta. Beyond this mention in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription of his great grandson we have no other information about Sri Gupta. I-Tsing, the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim, who visited India during 671-695 A.D. refers to a "great king" (Maharaja) Che-li-ki-to which is taken as the Chinese rendering of the Indian name Sri Gupta. This Sri Gupta, according to I-Tsing built a temple for some Chinese pilgrims near Mrigashikhavana. This temple, the ruins of which were still extant in I-Tsing's time, was known as the "Temple of China" and was endowed by the King with the revenues of 24 large villages. I-Tsing remarks that the temple was founded "about" 500 years before his time. There is nothing inherently impossible in the identification of Che-li-ki-to of I-Tsing's account with the Maharaja Sri Gupta[2] although it involves chronological difficulties. Fleet rejected the identification on the ground that "it is now certain that the era used by the early Guptas commenced in A.D. 319-320, the Maharaja Sri Gupta mentioned by I-Tsing and referred to by him about A.D. 175 cannot be identified with the founder of the early Gupta family, who lived in the 4th century A.D."[3] But the difficulty is more apparent than substantial. I-Tsing is obviously referring to the time of Sri Gupta on hearsay evidence and from memory and about 500 years is too round a figure to be interpreted literally. Even on that score there is a discrepancy of only half a century. If the initial year of the Gupta era is taken as the initial year of Chandra Gupta's reign and allotting a period of forty years each to the reigns of Ghatotkacha Gupta and Sri Gupta we get 240-280 A.D. as the time for Sri Gupta's reign. This is about 455 years before I-Tsing's time.[4] There should be little difficulty, then, in accepting the identification as a working hypothesis.

I-Tsing's reference to the temple gives us a starting point for a discussion on the original home of the Guptas. The Chinese

[1] Fleet, J., *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, III, "Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings," pp. 15-16. This work will hereinafter be abbreviated as *CII*.

[2] Allan, J., *Catalogue of Indian Coins*, Gupta Dynasty, p. XV.

[3] *Op. Cit.*, p. 8, Note 3.

[4] See Mookerji, R. K., *The Gupta Empire*, p. 11; also see Allan, *Op. Cit.*, p. XV; Majumdar and Altekar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 130.

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pilgrim places the temple as forty stages east of Nalanda descending the Ganges and fixes the position of Nalanda as seven stages north-east of Mahabodhi. This would place the temple of Mrigashikhavana in the Murshidabad district in the state of West Bengal.[5]

It has been pointed out that the name of the temple in I-Tsing's account should be read as Mrigasthapana and not as Mrigashikhavana.[6] This Mrigasthapana was in Varendri which was included in the dominions of Sri Gupta but Murshidabad is not in Varendri but in the Radha Division. Secondly, I-Tsing's stages come to some 240 miles and 240 miles due east is Murshidabad. But it seems from his account that I-Tsing first went to the Ganges from Nalanda and then from there sailed down the river. If the distance is taken to include the stage covered by I-Tsing from Nalanda to the Ganges and then along the river east then it would point to Maldah district which is north Murshidabad district.[7] In the *Puranas* the early Guptas are described as ruling over Magadha, Prayaga, Saketa and along the Ganges.[8] This indicates the fact that the original kingdom of the Guptas comprised Magadha and extended along the river Ganga into north Bengal. Some corroborative evidence for the rule of Sri Gupta may be seen in two seals of which one is in Prakrit and gives the legend *Gutasya* while the other is in Sanskrit as Sri Guptasya. It is probable that these seals may belong to the founder of the Gupta dynasty, more particularly the Sanskrit seal.[9]

What was the social background of this Gupta family? The question is beset with considerable difficulty. The Gupta inscriptions do not refer to their caste and it is left to Prabhavati Gupta, the daughter of Chandra Gupta II, to mention the fact that their *gotra* was Dharana.[10] It is rather curious that the Gupta inscriptions should remain silent on this important fact of geneological history of their family and that it should have been left to the

[5] Ganguly, D. C., "The Early Home of the Imperial Guptas," *Indian Historical Quarterly*, XIV, p. 534; K. P. Jayaswal in his *History of India*, places the fief held by Sri Gupta near Allahabad, p. 113.

[6] Majumdar, R. C. (Ed.), *History of Bengal*, p. 69.

[7] Chattopadhyaya, S., *Early History of North India*, pp. 137-138.

[8] Pargiter, *Op. Cit.*, p. 53, note 8.

[9] See *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1901, p. 99, and 1905, p. 814.

[10] *Epigraphia Indica*, XV, pp. 42-43.

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grand-daughter of Samudra Gupta to enlighten posterity on this point in her Poona Plates. This has been seized upon to infer that the Guptas were Karaskaras by caste and that "the word *gotra* in Prabhavati Gupta's inscription (Poona Plates) would mean a caste sub-division. Dhanri, the Jat clan found in Amritsar, may be compared with the Sanskrit Dharana of Prabhavati Gupta".[11] It has also been suggested that this Dharana *gotra* may be taken as an indication of the fact that the early Guptas were related to Dharini, the chief queen consort of Agnimitra Shunga![12] Such conjectures are no doubt interesting but do not encourage acceptance based as they are on rather doubtful evidence. The fact, however, remains that the silence of the Guptas about their *gotra* is not only intriguing but also seems to be deliberate.

The name Gupta is a term of wide and frequent occurrence in the literature and inscriptions of ancient India. It has no specific caste association though the law books mention that it is the proper termination of Vaishya names.[13] That this was not rigidly followed in actual practice is seen from the fact that the termination Gupta is found in association with names of Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas.[14]

It has been stated that the "Guptas were, comparatively speaking, people of low birth who raised themselves to a higher social status by their political greatness" and that they themselves "nowhere disclose their origin or caste status as if they have purposely concealed it".[15] But such adjectives as "low" or "high" are unsatisfactory as indicators of precise social status. Perhaps the key to our understanding of the social origin of the Imperial Guptas may be found in the marriage of Chandra Gupta I with the Lichchavi princess, Kumaradevi.

This marriage was an event of great significance for the early history of the Gupta dynasty. It is prominently referred to in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription and in subsequent epigraphs Samudra

[11] Jayaswal, K. P., *Op. Cit.*, pp. 114-116.

[12] Raychoudhuri, *Op. Cit.*, p. 443, note.

[13] For rules concerning naming of children of different castes see *Manavadharmasastra*, ii, 30 ff.

[14] See the author's paper: "The Origin of the Imperial Guptas", *Journal of the Bombay Branch of Royal Asiatic Society*, XXVII, supplement, pp. 275-278.

[15] Jayaswal, *Op. Cit.*, p. 114.

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Gupta is proudly described as the son of the daughter of the Licchavis. The political significance of this marriage will be seen presently. What did it mean in social terms?

The clan of the Licchavis figures very prominently in the annals of early Buddhism. They are invariably described as kshatriyas. Buddhaghosa, the celebrated Pali commentator has the following story to tell about the origin of the tribe of the Licchavis. "It came to pass that the chief queen of the king of Banaras was with child. When her time came, she was delivered, not of a child, but a lump of flesh, of the colour of *Lac* and of Bandhu and Jivaka flowers. Fearing the displeasure of the king if he should hear of this, the queen put the lump of flesh into a casket marked with the royal seal and placed it in the flowing waters of the Ganges. However, a certain god, wishing to provide for its safety, wrote with a piece of cinnabar on a slip of gold the words, "the child of the chief queen of the king of Banaras," tied it to the casket and replaced it in the river. The casket was discovered by an ascetic, and taken by him to his hermitage, where he cared for the lump of flesh. After the lapse of some time, the lump broke up into two pieces of flesh, which gradually assumed shape, till finally one of them became a boy resplendent like gold, and the other a girl. Whatever entered the stomach of these two infants looked as if put into a vessel of precious transparent stone (*Mani*) so that they seemed to have no skin (*nicchavi*). Others said: the two were attached to each other by their skin (*lina cchavi*) as if they had been sewn together, so that these infants came to be designated Licchavis."[16] This is obviously a fanciful interpretation of the two variant forms of the name—*Nicchavi* and *Licchavi*—whose precise meaning Buddhaghosa does not seem to know, but the significant point in the narrative comes further on when we are told that on coming of age the boy and the girl were married to each other and from this brother and sister union sprang the race of the Licchavis. In this connection we may refer to the remarkable similarity in the stories connected with the origins of the Sakyas and the Licchavis since both these group are described as progenies of brother and sister unions.[17] The *Laws of Manu* describes the Licchavis as Vratyas,

[16] See Law, B. C., *Tribes in Ancient India*, p. 299.

[17] *Sumangalavilasini*, I, p. 258.

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clearly implying thereby that they were outside the pale of the Brahmanical civilization.[18] It is true that like the Sakyas the Licchavis are also described as Kshatriyas but the term kshatriya in this context may be taken to mean representative of political power rather than a specific caste in the Brahmanical hierarchy.[19] The Licchavis were one of the most prominent of the republican tribes of ancient India and had such pride of race that their laws forbade the marriage of a Licchavi girl with an outsider.[20] This law must have had the most rigorous implementation when it came to the marriage of a daughter of a leading oligarchic family like that of Kumaradevi, the mother of Samudra Gupta. It may, then, be assumed, that such a marriage would indicate that the Guptas must have been, both ethnically and culturally, very close to the Licchavis and like the Licchavis were, originally, members of a non-Brahmanical milieu and were recent entrants to the Brahmanical hierarchy. This is indicated by their enthusiasm for the performance of the Vedic sacrifices and Sanskrit religious literature and their role in the ushering of the Brahmanical revival which is a characteristic of the culture of the Gupta age. Caste and *gotra,* therefore, become somewhat irrelevant as indices of social origins and status.

Scarcely anything of significance is known about Sri Gupta besides the fact that he was the founder of the dynasty and the deductions we have made about the original home of the Guptas and their social status from relevant evidence. His title—Maharaja—would suggest that his political status was quite humble among the kings of his times.

His son Ghatotkacha is known only from the inscriptions of the Guptas and his name is the only thing that is known about him. Presumably he continued to rule over his patrimony probably between 280-319 A.D. and passed it on to his son and successor Chandra Gupta I.

The Allahabad Pillar Inscription mentions three very signifi-

[18] *Manavadharmasastra,* X, 20, 22.

[19] See Fick, R., *Social Organization in North-East India in Buddha's Time* (trans. by Maitra), p. 81; Hermann Oldenberg, however, thinks Fick to be far too sceptical about the real significance of term *khattiya.* See *Indian Antiquary,* XLIX, p. 227.

[20] Chakravarty, "The Origin of the Licchavis of Vaisali", *I.H.Q.,* pp. 58-59.

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cant facts about Chandra Gupta I. The first is that he is described as Maharajadhiraja instead of the simple Maharaja, a title used for his two predecessors. This seems to be deliberate and must be taken to mean his higher political status. Whether this elevated status accrued to him was because of some fresh conquests and consequent enlargement of his dominions or was a result of his marriage with the Licchavi princess Kumaradevi we do not know. The second and perhaps the most important event of his career was his marriage. This marriage had a clear political significance since it is constantly referred to in Gupta records. It is probable that at the time of this marriage the Licchavis were the masters of Pataliputra and that as a consequence of this marriage the Gupta and Licchavi territories were united to build the foundations of the future Gupta empire. This marriage was commemorated by the Guptas with the issue of a set of new coins (medallions ?) bearing the figures of Chandra Gupta and Kumaradevi on one side and the legend of the Licchavis on the other. The Gupta kingdom which comprised parts of north and west Bengal and parts of north Bihar and north Uttar Pradesh must have been held by the Licchavis. This union, then, brought to Chandra Gupta important political influence and marked the beginning of the political advent of the Guptas on the political scene of northern India.

Chandra Gupta I is also credited with the foundation of the Gupta Era. It is generally held that the initial year of this era may be placed in 319-320 A.D. though there are divergent opinions on this.[21] The adoption or initiation of the Era must have marked some important event which may either have been the coronation of Chandra Gupta I or his marriage with Kumaradevi which may or may not have preceded his coronation. The coronation of Chandra Gupta I could not have been that all important event which his marriage certainly was. And if there is some strength in the argument that the Guptas possibly adopted the Licchavi Era as their own and called it the Gupta Era then the

[21] See Fleet, *Op. Cit.*, p. 130 for the 320 A.D. date; Mr. G. Pai places the initial year of the Era in 272-273 A.D., *Journal of Indian History*, XI, p. 188; D. N. Mukerji equates it with the Vikrama Era of 58 B.C. on astronomical evidence, *I.H.Q.*, VIII, pp. 85-92; See also *J.I.H.*, XVI, p. 132, where Mr. Sundarraman equates it with 284-285 A.D.

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marriage of Chandra Gupta with Kumaradevi must certainly claim as the important event for the starting of the Era.[22] In this context we may refer to the insistance with which Samudra Gupta is described as the son of the daughter of the Licchavis. The reference to the mother's name was no doubt due to the importance of the matrimonial alliance to the Guptas but it may also be attributed to the possibility that besides Kumaradevi, Chandra Gupta I had other wives and that Samudra Gupta wanted it to be quite clear as to who was his mother. This marriage might have taken place after Chandra Gupta had ruled for some years in which case the Era could be stated only as marking the momentous marriage. While there is no positive evidence to support this argument there is nothing inherently impossible for holding such a suggestion as being entirely implausible.

There has been considerable controversy about the identification of Chandra Gupta I with the king Chandra of the Mehrauli Pillar Inscription. This Chandra is an illusive personality and attempts have been made to identify him with persons as far removed from each other in time as Chandragupta Maurya, Chandra Gupta I and Chandra Gupta II as also Chandravarman of Pushkarana.[23] Without going into the details of the controversy it seems most plausible to hold that the description of the exploits of the Chandra of the Mehrauli Pillar are applicable more to the known facts of the life of Chandra Gupta II than that of his grandfather. The drama *Kaumudimahotsava* has the figure of a Chandra in its plot and this has been taken to mean it was Chandra Gupta I. On the strength of this a detailed reconstruction of some events in his life is attempted. It is pointed out that "at the time of the rise of Chandra, called by the Prakrit name of Chandasena in the *Kaumudimahotsava,* the king of

[22] Fleet, *Op. Cit.*, p. 69; Oldenberg concurs with Fleet's views, see *I.A.*, X, p. 215; for the suggestion that Samudra Gupta may have started the Era, see Majumdar and Altekar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 132; also see Mookerji, *Op. Cit.*, pp., 15-16.

[23] See Seth, H. C., in *J.I.H.*, XVI, pp. 117-123, for identification with Chandragupta Maurya; Basak, R. G. for Chandra Gupta I in *History of North-Eastern India*, p. 16; for Chandra Gupta II Dasarath Sharma in *J.I.H.*, pp. 14-15; also Jayaswal in *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Institute*, XVIII, p. 31; for identification with Chandravarman of Pushkarana see M. M. Harprasad Shastri, in *I.A.*, XII, pp. 215-219.

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Magadha at Pataliputra was Sundaravarman, ruling from his palace called Su-Gana.... King Sundarvarman was an old man, having a child of a few years of age yet in the charge of a nurse. Chandra or Chandasena had been adopted as his son by the king of Magadha, evidently before the birth of the young prince. Chandra regarded himself as the heir, being the elder, though a *kritaka* son. He entered into a marriage alliance with the Licchavis who are described as the enemy of the Magadha dynasty in the same drama *Kaumudimahotsava*. The Licchavis with a large army and Chandra laid a siege to Pataliputra. A battle was fought in which the old king Sundaravarman died. The young prince Kalyanavarman was carried away to the Kishkindha Hills by the faithful ministers.... Chandra having his caste against him and being somewhat a usurper, was disliked by the Magadhas of his day, particularly as he failed to adapt himself to the traditional Hindu way of government. He showed a hostile, repressive attitude to the people of Magadha. The *Kaumudimahotsava* records that Chandasena had put leading citizens into prison. The people of Magadha looked down upon him as something like a patricide. Chandra Gupta I had thus several elements against him. A cry was raised that he was not a kshatriya, he had practically killed his aged adoptive father on the battlefield, he had called in the aid of the hereditary enemies of Magadha—the Licchavis, he had married a lady who was neither a Magadhan nor a Brahmanical Hindu." Finally Chandrasena was ousted and killed.[24] Fascinating as is this story, its historical value is highly questionable for the only two elements common to the story and what we know of Chandra Gupta I are a part of his name and the connection with the Licchavis. The Chandasena of the story met with a violent death whereas there is nothing to indicate such an end for Chandra Gupta I. Again there is nothing to show that the drama belongs to the Gupta age and there is reason to believe that it may actually be of a later period.[25] The story of the drama must, therefore, be rejected as work of pure fiction. We have argued before that it is possible to hold that the commence-

[24] Jayaswal, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 113-118.

[25] See Jagannath, *Thomas Commemoration Volume*, p. 116; also see Winternitz, M., *S.K. Ayyangar Commemoration Volume*, p. 362; Chattopadhyaya, K., *I.H.Q.*, XIV, pp. 582-606.

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ment of the Gupta Era marked the marriage of Chandra Gupta with Kumaradevi the Licchavi princess and that the event took place in 319-320 A.D. The date of Samudra Gupta's accession is variously placed as in 335[26] and 350.[27] The earliest known date of Samudra Gupta's successor, Chandra Gupta II is 380 A.D. It is likely that Samudra Gupta died around 375-376 A.D.[28] In this context, then, the date of Samudra Gupta's accession as 320 or 335 would give us a long reign of anywhere between 56 and 41 years. Now, the Allahabad Pillar Inscription, as will be shown later, specifically mentions that Samudra Gupta was specially selected by his father to succeed him as being fit to rule. Further, the text of the inscription has an implication that Chandra Gupta retired or abdicated in favour of his son. If this assumption is correct then Samudra Gupta must have been about twenty-five or thirty years of age at the time of accession. If he ruled for 41 or 56 years his age at death must have been 66 or 81 years. This is not inherently impossible. On the other hand we have only two inscriptions of his time and some five coin types. The Nalanda and Gaya Copper Plates of the years five and nine have been regarded as spurious and need not be seriously considered here.[29] Chandra Gupta II ruled for some 36 years (*Ca.* 376-412 A.D.) and there are seven inscriptions of his reign and there are five major coin types besides currency in silver and copper issued during his time. Kumara Gupta ruled for 40 years (*Ca.* 414-454 A.D.) and has left behind thirteen inscriptions and nine different types of coins. Skanda Gupta ruled for about 11 years but has five inscriptions associated with his reign and has three types of gold coins in spite of the great economic drain caused by the Hun Invasion. If Samudra Gupta had ruled for forty or fifty years we should certainly expect many more inscriptions especially in view of the fact that his liberality is so highly praised in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription. It is more reasonable and plausible, then, to suppose that he began his reign around 350 A.D. and ruled for about a quarter century. If this assumption is valid then there is nothing unreasonable or improbable in assuming that he was

[26] Mookerji, R. K., *Op. Cit.*, p. 17.
[27] Chattopadhyaya, S., *Op. Cit.*, p. 148.
[28] Majumdar and Altekar, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 158-160.
[29] *Ibid.*, p. 132; *Indian Culture*, XI, p. 225.

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born around 322 and was about twenty-eight years of age at the time of his accession.

II

As a working hypothesis, then, we suggest that the initiation of the Gupta Era marked the marriage of Chandra Gupta I with Kumaradevi and that within a few years of that event Samudra Gupta was born. This was the period when the Guptas themselves were becoming "Brahmanized" and that it was, generally speaking, a period of the revival of Brahmanism. The early education of Samudra Gupta must have been influenced by this climate of opinion and faith and confirmed to the Brahmanical ideals concerning the training of a prince. After the initiation into the mysteries of the three R's at an early age the formal education of the prince was taken in hand. This began after the ceremony of tonsure was performed. He was taught the Triple *Vedas,* the science of *Anvikshaki* (philosophy) under teachers of acknowledged authority, the science of *Varta* (economics) under government superintendents, and the science of *Dandaniti* (politics) under theoretical and practical politicians. The Prince was urged to keep company with aged professors of sciences. He spent the forenoon in receiving lessons in military arts concerning elephants, horses, chariots, and weapons and devoted the afternoons to hearing the *Itihasa* (traditional history). The term *Itihasa* included history proper, narrative tales, illustrative stories, the Law Codes or *Dharmasastras* and the *Arthasastra.*[30] Besides these subjects, the prince was also expected to be taught literature, especially poetry, rhetoric and other parts of a liberal education. Samudra Gupta learnt all these and was specially interested in poetical composition as well as music as the Allahabad Pillar Inscription and his coins show. His interest in philosophy and literature is reported by a Buddhist account that he was a patron of the great Buddhist philosopher Vasubandhu.[31] His coins reveal a well-built and muscular physique and he is described as a warrior proudly displaying marks of hundreds of wounds received in battle. The basis for his later successes and achievements was

[30] See Shamasastry, R., *Kautilya's Arthasastra,* pp. 9-10.
[31] Smith, V. A., *Early History of India,* pp. 328 ff.

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well prepared in advance by his early education and experiences.

After the completion of his formal education came his marriage. The inscription of Chandra Gupta II as also of Kumara Gupta mention that the mother of Chandra Gupta II was Dattadevi. She is probably the lady who is described as a "virtuous and faithful wife" in the Eran Stone Pillar Inscription. Though she is the only woman mentioned by name as the spouse of Samudra Gupta it is likely that he had other wives besides her. We cannot be certain as to whether she was his first wife or his favourite wife. The latter seems to be more probable if we accept the view that Chandra Gupta II was specially selected by Samudra Gupta as his nominee for the Gupta throne and that this decision was partly influenced by the consideration that Chandra Gupta II was the child of the emperor's favourite wife. There may have been a precedent for this in his own case for he was the son of Kumaradevi who must have occupied a special position in the household of Chandra Gupta I by virtue of the fact that she was a Licchavi princess and was the favourite consort of Chandra Gupta I. All this is, however, conjecture for there is no evidence to support it; nor is there evidence to the contrary to make it improbable.

III

As the years rolled on Chandra Gupta I was concerned about the problem of succession. At this point certain passages in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription offer some intriguing evidence. The seventh line of this famous epigraph says that Samudra Gupta "being looked at (with envy) by the faces, melancholy (through the rejection of themselves), of others of equal birth, while the attendants of the court breathed forth deep sighs (of happiness), was bidden by (his) father,—who, exclaiming 'verily (he is) worthy,' embraced (him) with the hairs of (his) body standing erect (through pleasure) (and thus) indicative of (his) sentiments, and scanned in affection (and) laden with tears (of joy), (and) perceptive of (his noble nature),—(to govern of a surety) the whole world".[32] Divested of all the poetical flourishes the passage quoted above tells us some important facts concerning the accession of Samudra Gupta. First of all it makes a special

[32] Fleet, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 11-12.

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mention of the fact that Samudra Gupta was specially selected by his father to succeed him. Secondly, this nomination was made in an open court with all the courtiers and others being present. Thirdly, that the declaration found favour with some and that others, "of equal birth" were melancholy (through the rejection of themselves). We will now discuss in some detail the implications of these conclusions.

While it may be argued that assembling a court for the nomination of a successor may not be an unusual procedure it certainly looks rather unusual in this context. It has been generally held that royal successions in ancient India were governed by the laws of primogeniture.[33] Exception was made to this general condition only when the eldest son was considered either defective, because of physical disability or mental incapacity, or undesirable as a successor. The Inscription makes a special mention of the fact that "others of equal birth" were present and available for nomination. The conclusion, therefore, is obvious that Samudra Gupta was not the eldest son of Chandra Gupta and that among others of equal birth he alone was considered to be the fittest for kingship. It is also permissible to argue that the question of succession must have been exercising the minds and ambitions of several other claimants to the throne and that Chandra Gupta I wanted to settle it finally by a public declaration of his nomination. The court must have been already divided into factions some of which were opposed to Samudra Gupta on several grounds one of which may have been that he was not the eldest son. Secondly there may have been some objection to his selection on the ground that he was the son of a Licchavi princess, and it is here that the Brahmanical Law Codes offer some suggestive hints. The Licchavis, as we have seen earlier, were not regarded by Manu and others as anything but *Vratyas* (outside the pale of Brahmanical culture) presumably because of their unorthodox ways and support to heretical creeds like Buddhism and Jainism. Again, the Licchavis were also well-known for their fierce love of independence and willingness to go to war and general propensity to being irrascible and unamenable to restraints of tradition. They possessed at this time considerable political power and it must have been feared that the selection of Samudra Gupta

[33] See Altekar, A. S., *State and Government in Ancient India*, pp. 54-55.

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may strengthen the Licchavi hold on the Gupta court. This must have been particularly feared by the orthodox Brahmanical elements and possibly this was the reason why Samudra Gupta went all out to placate this element by patronizing, in the orthodox manner, Brahmanism. His Allahabad and Eran Inscriptions praise him for his liberality to the Brahmanas and perhaps this was the way Samudra Gupta chose to reassure the wavering that he was as good a Brahmanist as anybody else they cared to nominate. His Licchavi parentage may have also helped him to win the nomination, for his being a "son of the daughter of the Licchavis" would imply Licchavi political and military support behind his position as King.

The expression of pleasure at the public act of nomination on the part of his father is more than mere rhetorical flourish. Chandra Gupta I, agitated as he must have been, by the possibility of the growth of warring factions at the court must have been genuinely pleased that he had finally, and perhaps after deep deliberation and mature conclusion, forstalled such war-like eventualities about the accession of his successor. He was also pleased that he had selected the best candidate among others of "equal birth" not only because of the excellence of the candidate himself, but also because that candidate happened to be the son of his influential and favourite wife. Samudra Gupta, as the sequel will describe, more than justified his selection.

At the time when the nomination for succession was made in a formal court ceremony Chandra Gupta I must have been advanced in age. The Inscription seems to imply that what Chandra Gupta I did in the court was not simply nomination but also brought about actual succession by abdicating in favour of his son.[34] Samudra Gupta at this time was old enough to assume the responsibility of the administration and had already shown promise of his outstanding qualities. This would indicate a peaceful transfer of power from Chandra Gupta I to Samudra Gupta.

But was this transfer so peaceful or is there a possibility that the displeasure felt by some at the announcement of the nomination manifested itself in hostile activities? In this connection the discovery of some coins bearing the name of Kacha is taken to mean that such hostility did materialize in a war of succession.

[34] See Majumdar and Altekar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 137.

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These coins bearing the name of Kacha are comparatively few in number and their gold content is also inferior to that of the coins of Samudra Gupta. In their standard, fabric and execution these coins are not far removed in time from the reign of Samudra Gupta. Now, who was this Kacha? His name is not mentioned in any of the official records of the Gupta dynasty. It is argued that Kacha is but another name for Samudra Gupta which must have been assumed by Kacha after his extensive conquests.[35] This suggestion, in itself, is not improbable. Chandra Gupta II had another name called Devaraja or Devagupta but this other name is mentioned in inscriptions like the one at Sanchi and a Vakataka inscription describing Prabhavati Gupta as the daughter of Devagupta and Kuberanaga.[36] The alleged other name of Samudra Gupta—Kacha Gupta—is not mentioned in any inscription but occurs only on his coins. Secondly the coins of Kacha Gupta are few in number and there are also some significant typological changes in the sequence Chandra Gupta I-Kacha Gupta-Samudra Gupta. Chandra Gupta I is shown, on his coins (if the issue is one of coins and not commemorative medallions),[37] wearing tight fitting coat and trousers, head-dress, ear-rings and armlets holding in his left hand a crescent-topped standard bound with fillet etc. On the other side there is the figure of the goddess Lakshmi dressed in a loose robe-like garment, seated on lion encouchant facing to right or left, holding fillet in outstretched right hand and cornucopiae in left arm, her feet resting on a lotus. The coins of Kacha Gupta show him standing in the same manner holding a standard surmounted by a wheel (*Chakra*) in left hand. The reverse is the same as on the previous coins. The standard types of Samudra Gupta's coins are similar to the two above with the difference, and a significant difference at that, that instead of the wheel (*Chakra*) they show the *garuda,* the mythical bird-vehicle of Vishnu.[38] From this comparison it is evident that the coins of Chandra Gupta I and Kacha Gupta are similar in design and decoration while those of Samudra Gupta show a significant change, the *chakra* being substituted by the *garuda.*

[35] See Mookerji, R. K., *Op. Cit.,* p. 17.
[36] Fleet, *Op. Cit.,* p. 29; Mookerji, R. K., *Op. Cit.,* p. 46.
[37] For the latter view see Mookerji, R. K., *Op. Cit.,* p. 33.
[38] Allan, *Catalogue of Indian Coins,* Gupta Dynasties, pp. 1-15.

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We have alluded to the difficulty of precisely placing Kacha Gupta in the list of Gupta kings. Fleet regarded Kacha "as a possible second name of Samudra Gupta" but was not certain about it.[39] H. C. Raychoudhuri is of the same opinion.[40] D. R. Bhandarkar, however, thought that the Kacha Gupta coins should be read as Rama Gupta coins[41] and Dasarath Sharma subscribes to it.[42] According to the late R. D. Bannerji, Kacha "appears to be a son of Chandra Gupta I who had lost his life during the lifetime of his father, very probably in the war of independence."[43] The late Rev. Fr. H. Heras, S. J. argued that a "rebellion of Samudra Gupta's brothers against him in the beginning of his reign is hinted at in the Allahabad Inscription and probably described in the same, this description now being irreparably lost on account of the gaps in the inscription. His brothers seem to be allied against Samudra Gupta, most likely to proclaim king the eldest among them in his stead. Such proclamation was actually carried out and the eldest brother of Samudra Gupta, presumably Kacha, was enthroned; and accordingly the coin was issued in his name, through which only his existence is known to us. But his intrusion did not last long, this being the reason of the small number of his coins and of their being all of the same type. Soon Samudra Gupta defeated his brothers, and they finally acknowledged him as the real successor of their father."[44]

It is easy to see what objections there could be against the foregoing reconstruction of the sequence of events in the early part of the reign of Samudra Gupta. It has been argued, for instance, that acceptance of the hypothesis that Kacha was an elder brother of Samudra Gupta and led a rebellion against the king is accepted, it would invalidate the assumption of the abdication of Chandra Gupta I in favour of Samudra Gupta.[45] But

[39] *Op. Cit.*, p. 18; also see Smith, V., "Revised Chronology", *I.A.*, XXXI, pp. 259-261.

[40] *P.H.A.I.*, p. 447.

[41] "New Light on Early Gupta History," *Malaviya Commemoration Volume*, p. 205.

[42] "The Location of Kartripura", *J.I.H.*, XIV, pp. 30-32.

[43] *The Imperial Guptas*, p. 10.

[44] "Two controversial events in the reign of Samudra Gupta", *Annals of The Bhandarkar Oriental Institute*, IX, pp. 83-87.

[45] Chattopadhyaya, S., *Op. Cit.*, p. 147.

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it is difficult to see the force in such an argument. Is it to be assumed that a rebellion of hypothetical elder brother against Samudra Gupta even during the life time of Chandra Gupta I is an inherent impossibility? Do we not have instances of rebellion of princes against a reigning monarch as in the cases of the rebellion of Salim (future Jahangir) against the great Akbar (1600-1603), the rebellions of Khusrau (1606) and Khurram (future Shah Jahan, 1622-24) and the war of succession fought by Aurangzeb against his elder brother Dara Shukoh and father Shah Jahan (1657-1658)? There is, therefore, nothing impossible in the assumption that in spite of the abdication of Chandra Gupta I there was a rebellion presumably led by Kacha. Another objection may be found in the fact that there is not a single inscription of Kacha Gupta on record which is rather puzzling if we accept the possibility that he declared himself king against the claim of Samudra Gupta and the nomination by Chandra Gupta I. This may be explained on the ground that the issuance of inscriptions was an occasional matter and it was not considered necessary to issue an inscription in vindication of the fact of rulership. But the issuance of coinage was certainly necessary to legally establish the fact of accession and that is why we find coins of Kacha Gupta though there are no inscriptions referring to him. Then there is the problem of the substitution of the *chakra* standard by the *garuda* standard between the coins of Kacha Gupta and Samudra Gupta. It may be argued that this need not necessarily mean different personalities since it can be explained on the assumption that the *garuda* standard replaced the *chakra* standard on Samudra Gupta's conversion to Vaishnavism. But for this we must further assume that the conversion took place fairly early in the reign of Samudra Gupta for the Kacha type of coins are relatively few in number whereas the *garuda* standard appears on the standard type which is numerous. But could not the paucity of Kacha coins be explained on the ground that the intrusion of Kacha Gupta was a short-lived affair. The assumption of high-sounding titles like "destroyer of all kings" by Kacha may be explained as a hurried boast of an insecure contender contrived more to convey ambitions than to reflect actual achievements.

Finally the text of the Allahabad Pillar Inscription clearly conveys an implication of some dispute regarding succession. The

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poet who drafted the text, and he was a responsible officer of the empire, deliberately emphasized the fact of opposition both as a fact and as proof of his patron's achievements in spite of opposition to him in the initial part of the reign. It is only on the hypothesis that Kacha was a person different from Samudra Gupta and the possibility that he led a war of succession against Samudra Gupta that certain passages in the inscription became clearly intelligible. To summarize (*a*) the inscription clearly hints at a disputed succession; (*b*) the coins of Kacha Gupta, especially in the matter of the standard and the small number, cannot be satisfactorily explained through ascription to Samudra Gupta; and (*c*) nothing is inherently impossible in the occurrence of a rebellion against the claim of Samudra Gupta. And this hypothesis also helps us in understanding the motivation for some of the military steps taken by Samudra Gupta soon after his accession.

Presumably the rebellion led by Kacha was a short-lived affair and was easily crushed by Samudra Gupta. Soon after his nomination, must have taken place the coronation which may be placed around 350 A.D. The *abhisheka* or coronation of a prince in ancient India was a magnificent ceremony attended by all the pomp and glory which wealth could muster and ambition justify. The arrangements for the ceremony were completed under the supervision of the council of ministers which body, in this case, must have been especially enthusiastic since the nomination was specially to their liking. The ceremony was performed by the senior ministers with water brought in golden vessels from various sacred rivers and lakes.[46] A special pavilion was erected for the ceremony with a *vedi* or a sacrificial altar in the centre and seats for kings and nobles specially invited for the occasion. The king-designate sat on a special seat and then the sacred waters were sprinkled over his head and body to the accompaniment of music played by leading musicians. After this he was offered portions of *durva* grass, sprouts of the barley plant, barks of trees, and flowers. These symbolized prosperity of agriculture and its blessings.

Then the leading priest recited chants from the *Vedas*, especially those that were expected to bestow on the king the power

[46] For a description of such ceremonies in classical India, see Upadhyaya, B., *India in Kalidasa*, p. 92.

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of winning victories in war. Then the bards sang the traditional songs extolling the greatness of his dynasty and the heroes of old. The king offered gifts to Brahmanas and those learning the sacred scriptures, courtly retainers and indigent persons. Then the king entered his court and sat upon the hereditary throne surmounted by the royal canopy. Here he assumed the insignia of royalty like the sceptre, the footstool, the fly-whisk and the royal umbrella. As he sat there he received tribute from the feudatories, his own subjects and envoys of foreign courts presented their felicitations and offered him presents. In the days of old there also used to be sports and festivals to celebrate the coronation and institutions of learning and culture received special gifts on such occasions. Thus was formally heralded the birth of a new regime.[47]

[47] Saletore, B. A., *Life in the Gupta Age*, pp. 176-79.

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CHAPTER THREE

The Invincible

AT THE time of the assumption of sovereignty the kingdom of Samudra Gupta was a conglomeration of territories tucked away in north Bihar and north and west Bengal. The sound of trumpets heralding the commencement of his reign must have gladdened the hearts of his adherents. But the name Samudra Gupta still meant little to most parts of India and the drums that resounded to the proclamation of his name as King could scarcely have caused a flutter in the hearts of princes and potentates in the surrounding areas. Of his action after the assumption of kingship his Allahabad Inscription is our best source of information. The relevant part is worth quoting here:

"By whom,—having, unassisted, with the force of the prowess of (his) arm that rose up so as to pass all bounds, uprooted Achyuta and Nagasena .....;—(by whom), causing him who was born in the family of the Kotas to be captured by (his) armies, (and) taking his pleasure at (the city) that had the name of Pushpa ..... whose great good fortune was mixed with, so as to increase by (his) glory produced by the favour shown in capturing and then liberating Mahendra of Kosala, Vyaghraraja of Mahakantara, Mantaraja of Kurala, Mahendragiri of Pishtapura, Swamidatta of Kottura on the hill, Damana of Erandapalla, Vishnugopa of Kanchi, Nilaraja of Avamuktaka, Hastivarman of Vengi, Ugrasena of Palakka, Kubera of Devarashtra, Dhananjaya of Kusthalapura and all the other kings of the region of the south:—who abounded in majesty that had been increased by violently exterminating Rudradeva, Matila, Nagadatta, Chan-

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dravarman, Ganapatinaga, Nagasena, Achyuta, Nandin, Balavarman and many other kings of the land of Aryavarta".[1]

This is quite an impressive list of conquests which must have taken Samudra Gupta and his troops all over India. Before we go into the details of kings defeated, uprooted and overwhelmed, it is necessary to examine the complex of causes which was responsible for the manifestation of such fierce and aggressive military activity on the part of the Gupta ruler.

II

In this the Inscription does not give us much direct help. It is admirable in its personal and geographical information and there is reason to believe that the narrative of the sequence of events is guided by chronological order. It is possible to argue that the general cause for this outburst of aggressive activity by the Guptas may be seen in the general philosophy of war and conquest as enunciated by the works on polity like the *Arthasastra,* the epics like the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* and the Legal Books like those of Manu, Vishnu and Yajnyavalkya. Let us, therefore, analyse the content of thought in these works bearing on the philosophy of war and conquest.

The *Arthasastra* at the very outset defines the duties of the several classes that comprised Indian society of those days. Among these the caste of the Kshatriyas was associated with political power and its duties are defined as "study, performance of sacrifice, giving gifts, military occupation, and protection of life".[2] The military duties, in a sense, are the most important and the objectives of the science of government are defined by Kautilya as "to make acquisitions, to keep them secure, to improve them, and to distribute among the deserved the profits of improvement".[3] Strength is defined as of three kinds, namely, "power of deliberation is intellectual strength; the possession of a prosperous treasury and a strong army is the strength of sovereignty; and martial power is physical strength".[4] A king who thinks himself superior in strength to his prospective enemy "shall wage war".[5] This sentiment is invariably echoed by the law books when they de-

[1] Fleet, *Op. Cit.,* pp. 12-14. [2] Shamasastry, *Op. Cit.,* p. 6.
[3] *Ibid.,* p. 8. [4] *Ibid.,* p. 291. [5] *Ibid.,* p. 293.

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clare that "when a king feels that his army is strong and kingdom prosperous, and notices that the case is reverse with his opponents, he is at liberty to declare a war against them".[6] Though the *Mahabharata,* in its didactic parts, strongly emphasizes the ideal of righteousness (*dharma*) and puts forward the concept of *Raja-dharma* (Royal duties) it does not outlaw war; rather it indicates a position wherein it would condone war if it is a *dharmayuddha* (righteous war) and not an *asuravijaya* (selfish and greedy conquest).[7] War was a recognized institution in ancient India and ancient Indian society had created a class whose business in life was to prepare for and fight wars. This was the Kshatriya class for whom it was shameful to die in bed.[8] War, therefore, was the natural and legitimate business of kings and political realists like Kautilya sought no more justification for waging war than the ability to do so and enlarge the size of the kingdom. This is not to say that war, for its own sake, has been lauded and glorified; the implication is that war is always taken as an important element of the political reality of a country of continental dimensions divided by a system of plurality of states. Of these numerous states many were obviously and almost continuously small in their territorial bases and weak in their military strength and thus naturally invited aggression and annexation from their more powerful neighbours. The history of India is full of instances of aggression pursued on more or less flimsy pretexts right from the time of the Nandas to the British conquest of India and Samudra Gupta belonged to this tradition of war and conquest.

But even if war is regarded as both inevitable and legitimate and is potentially existent at all times it does require some immediate causes for the potentiality to burst into an actuality. What were the immediate causes for Samudra Gupta to undertake these campaigns. The manner in which these campaigns are described in the Inscription supports the belief that they are enumerated in their chronological order. And the terms used for characterising the different conquests are also chosen with great deliberation. Some were "uprooted", the twelve kings of the south were defeated and reinstated and the more than nine kings of north India

[6] See Altekar, *State and Government in Ancient India,* p. 217.
[7] See Ghosal, U. N., *A History of Indian Political Ideas,* p. 191.
[8] Anushasana Parva, *Mahabharata,* X; *Shukranitisara,* VI, 7, 305.

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were "violently exterminated". The term "uprooted" may mean that the kings were deposed and their states annexed. The South Indian kings were, presumably, asked to pay tribute and were allowed to continue to rule over their respective territories without any fear of interference from the Gupta overlord. The nine kings of the north were obviously slain. The order in which the events are recorded indicates that there were three distinct campaigns fought by Samudra Gupta and two of these were in northern India.

III

The names of the three kings who were "uprooted" in the first campaign are given as Achyuta, Nagasena and a prince of the family of the Kotas. Coins bearing the name of an Acyu have been found in the Ahicchatra region which would roughly comprise the modern Ramnagar and Bareilly districts of the state of Uttar Pradesh.[9] In this connection it has been pointed out that "a king named Achyuta had risen to power in Ahichhatra (Rohilkhand) by middle of the fourth century A.D. His coin-type bears a close resemblance to that of some Naga coins and it is not improbable that he was himself a Naga ruler, perhaps a scion of a collateral branch of the Mathura family."[10] A Nagasena has been described as a ruler of Padmavati (Padam Pawaya, 25 miles northeast of Narwar in Madhya Pradesh) by the *Harshacharita* of Bana[11] while coins with the name of Kota have been found in the East Punjab and the Delhi region, and possibly, the Kotas also ruled over the Upper Gangetic valley.[12] Both Achyuta and Nagasena figure again in the Inscription in the list of kings who were "violently exterminated".

What were the reasons for this campaign? The Nagas began as feudatories of the Kushans and by the second half of the second century A.D. developed into the two independent and powerful houses ruling from Padma Pawaya (near Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh) and Mathura in western Uttar Pradesh. The *Puranas* mention a list of seven kings ruling from Mathura and nine from

[11] *Ibid.*, pp. 139-40.
[12] *Ibid.*, pp. 36-40, 139-40.
[9] Allan, *Op. Cit.*, p. XXII.
[10] Majumdar and Altekar, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 39-40.

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Padmavati indicating thereby that around 325 A.D. the Nagas were an important power just about the time when the Guptas themselves were becoming important. The Nagas of Padmavati were probably the Bharasivas who conquered territories up to the Ganges and performed ten horse sacrifices revealing their imperial ambitions. There are two Naga names in the list of the nine kings of Aryavarta besides those of Nagasena and Achyuta and they are Ganapatinaga and Nagadatta. Of these Ganapatinaga was a Naga ruler of Mathura and Nagadatta is not definitely identified though it is possible that he too was a Naga ruler.[13] The position of the Nagas and the location of the territories under their control bring out the fact that they constituted the most important challenge to the rising Gupta power in any scheme of Gupta expansion there was bound to be a Gupta-Naga clash.

Immediately after the mention of the three kings in the first list, the Inscription has a part referring to Samudra Gupta spending some happy time at Pushpapura. Pushpapura is another name for Pataliputra, the old Maurya capital and an important centre controlling communications in Bihar. It is not quite clear whether the reference is to an occupation of Pataliputra subsequent to the defeat of the three kings or is simply a mention of the fact that the interval between the first and the second campaigns was spent happily by Samudra Gupta in the capital. If it is correct, as is believed, that the Licchavis were masters of Pataliputra, then the reference may be taken simply to mean that the conqueror lived in Pataliputra before he embarked on his second campaign. It is not quite clear what connection there was between the two Naga Kings and the Kota ruler and Pataliputra, for their territories were at a distance from the capital and there is no evidence to show that any of them held the city at any time. It has been suggested that Achyuta, Nagasena and others attacked Samudra Gupta in Pataliputra as a part of the war of succession. Others have argued that Pataliputra was in the possession of the Kotas and was taken by Samudra Gupta on his defeat of Kacha Gupta.[13] Even if these are mere conjectures and that the suggestion about the possession of Pataliputra be found to be entirely untenable, there is reason to believe that the kings attacked must have provided some imme-

[13] *Ibid.*, pp. 139-40.

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diate provocation to Samudra Gupta, a provocation other than being merely important powers of the time. In this context we may refer to the problem of Kacha and consider the possibility of the provocation being that of involvement in the disputed succession. The Nagas were an important power and had imperial ambitions. They were staunch Brahmanists and could not have been much impressed by the Gupta-Licchavi alliance as an example of discreet matrimony. And they must also have been apprehensive of the rising power of the Guptas which they rightly understood would, in its expansion, challenge their very existence. If there had been some dispute about the succession of Samudra Gupta, intervention in that dispute would have been too tempting a possibility for them to resist. In such a situation, then, they could easily have tried to fish in troubled waters by supporting one faction against another with a view to stem the tide of the rising strength of the Guptas by making one party to the dispute their own protege. If this happened then it would have been a provocation enough for Samudra Gupta to attack them along with his opponent to the Gupta throne. Now if that opponent was in Pataliputra it is natural to assume that his confederates would march in the direction of the city where they were met by Samudra Gupta and defeated. Such a hypothetical reconstruction would help our understanding of the reference to Pataliputra and also the meaning of the term *"unmulya"* or uprooted. After their defeat Samudra Gupta apparently deposed them and possibly annexed their territories thus rendering them harmless for the time being.

IV

And then came the second or south Indian campaign. It is possible that Samudra Gupta agreed with Kautilya that a wise king, trained in polity, though possessing a small territory, should conquer the whole earth with the help of the best-fitted elements of his sovereignty.[14] While this may have been the general attitude of the Gupta king, how did he think of implementing it? Even if there was behind it an ambition of conquest as its own justification could there have been some other and more immediate reason

[14] Shamasastry, *Op. Cit.*, p. 289.

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for this campaign? In this context the contact with the Naga kings may shed some light on the other motivation behind Samudra Gupta's conduct. The Nagas, as observed before, were staunch Brahmanists and had performed as many as ten horse sacrifices which, though politically of not much import, were, all the same, considerably attractive as prestige-symbols. We have also seen that the Guptas, like the Licchavis, were but recent entrants into the Brahmanical society and possessed all the enthusiasm of "new converts". Samudra Gupta may have been influenced by the reputation of the Nagas for the performance of the coveted Vedic rite of horse sacrifice. Since the time of Pushyamitra Shunga there was a general revival of the Vedic cults and the Satavahanas, Bharasivas, Salankayanas and many others performed many of the Vedic sacrifices including the horse sacrifice as testaments of their Brahmanical faith and political prestige. It has been argued that Samudra Gupta received the inspiration for the performance of the horse sacrifice from one of the south Indian kings, more particularly the Salankayana kings, for south India was at this time the land of the Vedic customs.[15] But Samudra Gupta did not have to go so far south to find Vedic customs being practised. Nearer home there was the example of the Bharasivas. It is more plausible to argue that he may have been influenced by the Bharasiva example before he started on the south Indian campaign than that he was inspired to perform the sacrifice after being half way through the campaign in the territory of the Salankayanas of Vengi. Our conclusion is that Samudra Gupta thought of performing the horse sacrifice after his encounter with the Nagas and that his south Indian campaign was in the nature of an *Asvamedha* campaign.[16]

The enumeration of the names and territories of the twelve kings of the south appears to be in chronological order. Of these the first to be defeated was Mahendra of Kosala. Kosala which is identified with Dakshina Kosala comprised the districts of Bilaspur, Raipur and Sambalpur, the first two being in Madhya Pradesh and the last in Orissa. Its capital seems to have been at

[15] Sircar, D. C., "Samudra Gupta's Asvamedha Sacrifice", *Journal of Indian History*, pp. 35-40.

[16] I am indebted to the late Rev. Fr. H. Heras, S.J. for this suggestion.

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Sripura or Sirpur.[17] The next on the list is Vyaghraraja of Mahakantara which is identified by some with eastern Gondawana, its king being an Ucchakalpa ruler with his capital at Sambalpur.[18] But this location would place the kingdom north of the Vindhyas whereas it is specifically included in Dakshinapath. More plausibly the kingdom comprised the Jeypore forest tract in Orissa. Then came the turn of Mantaraja of Kurala which is identified by scholars with as many as three different places. The most likely location may be found in the Sonepur district of the State of Madhya Pradesh for it is next in line with the kingdom of Mahakantara.[19] From Kurala Samudra Gupta proceeded due south and defeated Mahendragiri of Pishtapura which is Pithapuram in the Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh. The next to be subjected to conquest was Swamidatta of Kottura the place being identified with Kothur in the Ganjam district or with Kottura in the Vizagpatam district. After that came the turn of Damana of Erandapalla which is equated with Erandapalli near Chicacole on the Orissan coast. From the Orissa Coast Samudra Gupta seems to have struck southwards and marched up to the kingdom of the Pallavas of Kanchi whose king Vishnugopa acknowledged defeat. This seems to be the farthest south that Samudra Gupta went on his campaign in the south. Nilaraja of Avamuktaka is not known from any other source while Hastivarman of Vengi was the Salankayana king ruling in the Ellore taluk in the Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh. Ugrasena of Palakka has been identified with a ruler of Palakkada, south of the Krishna river, and possibly a feudatory of the Pallavas. Kubera of Devarashtra ruled in the Yellamanchili region in the Vizagpatam district of Andhra Pradesh while Dhananjaya of Kusthalapura is not definitely identified. The place has been located at Kuttalur, near Polur in north Arcot district in Madras State.[20]

The route taken by Samudra Gupta on this long campaign seems to be somewhat as follows: From Pataliputra (near Patna

[17] Sircar, D. C., *The Successors of the Satavahanas*, p. 129.
[18] Mookerji, R. K., *Op. Cit.*, p. 21.
[19] Chattopadhyaya, S., *Op. Cit.*, p. 153.
[20] For various identifications of these place names see Majumdar and Altekar, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 145-46; Chattopadhyaya, S., *Op. Cit.*, pp. 152-54; Mookerji, R. K., *Op. Cit.*, pp. 20-23.

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in Bihar) he proceeded to the triangular area formed by Bilaspur, Raipur and Sambalpur in the east-central parts of Madhya Pradesh and north Orissa. From there he struck into the heart of the forest tracts of Orissa and then along the eastern seaboard to the kingdom of the Pallavas centred round Kanchi and followed, more or less, the eastern route back to his capital. It has been suggested that Samudra Gupta defeated in one battle all the twelve kings who fought him as a confederacy in the region of the river Krishna but this is not supported at all by the Inscription.[21]

The twelve kings were captured and then freed and reinstated in their territories. As to why Samudra Gupta having defeated them did not annex their territories is not quite clear. But the reasons may have been that while the Gupta king was away in the south there were disturbances in the north and this did not give him enough time to consolidate his rule in the conquered territories in the south. There is also the possibility that he had the wisdon to realize that annexation of all the southern territories conquered was something quite within his power to accomplish but much beyond his ability to hold on to. But the more likely reason is that of the disturbances in the north.

V

But even before it was concluded the southern campaign raised some serious problems for Samudra Gupta. The campaign itself was a spectacular military feat during the course of which Samudra Gupta must have marched as many as 3000 miles leading his troops across hills and forests, traversing principalities and kingdoms inhabited by diverse political and cultural societies. We have noticed how his rising power was challenged by the Naga kings who were divested of their possessions but spared of their lives. The Inscription goes on to tell us that in addition to the defeat of the twelve south Indian kings Samudra Gupta violently exterminated (*prasbha-oddharana-odvritta*) nine kings of Arya-

[21] Majumdar and Altekar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 140, note 4; for other reconstructions of the sequence of events see Jayaswal, *History of India*, pp. 135-39 and Jouveau-Dubreuil, G., *Ancient History of the Deccan*, pp. 59-61; also Sathianathaier, R., *Studies in the Ancient History of Tondamandalam*, pp. 14-19.

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varta. These nine kings are mentioned as Rudradeva, Matila, Nagadatta, Chandravarman, Ganapatinaga, Nagasena, Achyuta, Nandin and Balavarman. Of these two, Achyuta and Nagasena, occur in the first list as being "uprooted". The inference is that in the second campaign in northern India these kings were slain. The occurrence of four Naga names in these lists indicates the serious nature of the threat to the Guptas from the Naga power of the times. But in spite of these wars of extermination the Naga power survived which is indicated by the fact that a naga princess, Kuberanaga, was married to Chandra Gupta II, the son of Samudra Gupta. The offspring of this union was Prabhavati Gupta who figures so much in Vakataka history. It seems reasonable to assume that the Vakatakas were not touched at all by the conquests of the Guptas. They were deliberately left alone by the Gupta conqueror since he was not in a position to take on the Vakatakas as well as the rest of the rulers in the country at that time. The importance of the Vakatakas was duly recognized by the Guptas when Chandra Gupta II gave his daughter Prabhavati Gupta in marriage to the Vakataka prince Rudrasena II.

Of the nine kings of the Aryavarta, Chandravarman has been identified with the king of the same name whose record has been found at Susunia in the Bankura district of West Bengal.[22] Matila ruled over the territory of the present Bulandsahr district in Uttar Pradesh. Of Nandin and Balavarman we know nothing besides their names. The same holds true of Rudradeva though attempts have been made to identify him with Rudrasena Vakataka.[23] This, however, is improbable. Ganapatinaga was a king of Mathura and his death led to the annexation of Mathura to the Gupta Empire. The violent treatment meted out to these rulers must have followed serious provocation. This could have come from a conspiracy led by the Naga powers and assisted by other apprehensive elements creating a serious situation for the Guptas. That Samudra Gupta could be ruthless when occasion demanded it is shown by the fact that in the first campaign the two Naga kings were simply divested of their territories whereas in the second campaign they were slain and removed for ever as possible threats

[22] Majumdar and Altekar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 141; for a dissenting view see Chattopadhyaya, *Op. Cit.*, p. 157.

[23] Jayaswal, K. P., *History of India*, pp. 80-82.

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to the rising Gupta power. This was *Asuravijaya* in contrast with the *dharmavijaya,* of lenient treatment after conquest, in the south. But perhaps that *dharmavijaya* was itself a result of the threat in the north which made of it a virtue out of necessity !

These conquests and annexations considerably enlarged the territories directly under Gupta rule. The Gupta empire now included territories of the present state of Uttar Pradesh and parts of Madhya Pradesh and Bihar and Bengal. This was a great achievement, for with it the Guptas emerged from their obscurity of provincial satraps into the chronicle of the imperial history of India.

VI

All these triumphs naturally raised Samudra Gupta's prestige and carried his reputation as an invincible conqueror to the far corners of India. In consequence a number of border states and tribal republics hastened to accept a feudatory status and pay tribute instead of risking war. The Inscription tells us that the Malavas, Arjunayanas, Yaudheyas, Madrakas, Abhiras, Prarjunas, Sanakanikas, Kakas and Kharaparikas offered him tribute and maintained friendly relations with him. The area occupied by these tribes lay in Mandasore, Punjab and Rajasthan, Bharatpur, Garhwal and Rohilkhand, Sialkot area, Western Rajasthan, and large tracts in Madhya Pradesh. The Gupta sphere of influence thus extended into Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Delhi and Punjab and over the south a vague kind of Gupta hegemony was recognized by the defeated twelve kings.

Then there were the rulers of north and north-eastern parts who also resigned themselves to the fact of the rise of the Gupta empire and hastened to establish friendly relations with it. These were the states of Samatata (part of eastern Bengal bordering on the sea), Davaka (Nowgong district of Assam), Kamarupa (Assam), Nepal and Kartripura (Kartarpur in the Jullundar district of the Punjab).[24]

The pattern of relationships and the locations of the territories bound by diverse forms of relationships make an interesting picture. The core of the empire was formed by Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and parts of Bengal. These areas were directly administered under

[24] See Barua, *Early History of Kamarupa,* p. 42.

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the imperial system of administration now set up. Beyond these areas lay the tribal states and small kingdoms that were not directly annexed but were reduced to a subordinate status. Beyond that circle lay the southern kingdoms which were only nominally conquered but were handed back to the defeated kings perhaps on the understanding that they would pay an annual tribute. The tribal states and principalities were expected to pay a token tribute only in recognition of the suzerainty of the Guptas. All these campaigns, therefore, must have resulted in bringing into the Gupta treasury enormous amounts of money and this prosperity is now reflected in the gold coinage of the period. The establishment of the empire in the Gangetic areas must have encouraged trade and commerce which then must have become another important source of revenue.

Harishena, the composer of the Allahabad Pillar Inscription, tells us that another category of rulers also submitted to the hegemony of the Guptas and sent presents. These are described as Daivaputrashahishanushai and Sakamurunda. The first title implies the Kushan rulers ruling over parts of north-western India and Afghanistan. The second were the Saka satraps of Western India.[25] Ceylon is also mentioned along with these but in this there is an obvious mistake or confusion. The Ceylonese contemporary of Samudra Gupta was the king Meghavarna. According to the *Mahavamsa* he sent an embassy with the object of securing permission from the Gupta emperor to build a monastery at Bodhagaya in Bihar. Meghavarna's brother, it seems, was a Buddhist monk and had gone on a pilgrimage to India. At all monasteries he experienced difficulty as a foreigner. On his return he requested his brother to build monasteries for Ceylonese Buddhist monks throughout India. The king acted on this suggestion and sent an envoy to the court of Samudra Gupta with appropriate presents. Either, Samudra Gupta or, more possibly, Harishena, interpreted these presents as tribute. The permission to build the monastery was granted and subsequently the work was undertaken.[26]

[25] See *Epigraphia Indica,* XVI, p. 230 and XIV, pp. 292-93. Also *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society,* XXIII, p. 449 and XVIII, p. 210.

[26] Smith, V., "The Inscription of Mahanama at Bodh-Gaya", *I.A.,* XXXI, p. 194.

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Also in this context we may consider the reference to the "other islands". These must be taken to mean the Indianized kingdoms of the Malay Peninsula, Java and Sumatra with centres where Buddhistic studies were undertaken. It is probable that some of these kingdoms may have established diplomatic contacts with the Gupta empire by sending appropriate embassies bearing the customary gifts.

Even if we reject the claim made or implied in the Inscription that these areas offered submission to the Guptas the sphere of Gupta influence is impressive indeed. The fame of the Guptas spread not only all over India but also to parts of Afghanistan and Persia in the north-west, to Ceylon in the south and across the Bay of Bengal into the new Indianized world of South-east Asia. For a single life-time of no more than three score years this was a splendid achievement and justified assumption of lofty titles by the Gupta conqueror.

We have referred to the performance of a horse sacrifice by Samudra Gupta and perhaps he had the best justification for it. This horse sacrifice is attested by a special issue of coins bearing the picture of a horse tied to a sacrificial post on one side and the legend *Aswamedhaparakramah* (he whose valour lay in the performance of a horse sacrifice) on the other. In our opinion this must have been performed after the second north Indian campaign.[27] If that was so then the submission of token tribute and other customary gifts may have been presented at the time of the performance of the sacrifice which was presumably held at Patali-putra.

The Inscription mentions different styles of homage made by the different states. These are described as (a) *atma-nivedana,* (b) *kanyopayanadana* and (c) *garutmad-anka-svavishaya-bhukti-sasana-yachana.* Of these the first obviously means personal attendance at the court, the second means offer of daughters in marriage, and the third means request for the *garuda* seal and imperial charters confirming rulership over territories. The first and the third would indicate a definitely subordinate and feudatory status and it is doubtful whether distant powers like the Kushans and Sakas felt impelled to do that especially when it is remembered that the confines of the Gupta empire were still at a

[27] Allan, *Op. Cit.,* p. 21.

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comfortable distance from their own borders. The inclusion of Ceylon in this list definitely invalidates the veracity of these poetical phrases which were meant more to glorify a generous and brave patron than to attempt historical certitude.

Finally, the problem of the exact dimensions of the empire built up so impressively by Samudra Gupta and the chronology of his campaigns may be discussed. The empire included the whole of Bengal with the exception of the south-eastern part, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh with the frontier running along the foot-hills of the Himalayas, Punjab and the eastern districts between Lahore and Karnal, thence along the Jamuna up to its junction with the Chambal and then along a line passing by the west of Narwar almost due south to Eran and from there to Jabalpur and along the Vindhya range. The last is to be inferred from the mention of the Atavikarajas (forest kings) being made subordinates by Samudra Gupta in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription. The conquest of these forest kingdoms may have been undertaken before the south Indian campaign.[28]

We may now attempt an approximate chronological order for the events from accession to the conclusion of the campaigns. We have assumed that Samudra Gupta acceded to the throne sometime around 350 A.D. and ruled upto 376 A.D. If we accept the possibility of the rebellion of Kacha Gupta it will have to be placed around 350-351 A.D. Immediately after this the first North Indian campaign (or campaigns) was fought. The terminal date for this may be placed around 352-354 A.D. Then, perhaps, was undertaken the campaign to subjugate the Forest Kings and this must have taken another few years. By 360 A.D. Samudra Gupta was ready to embark on the south Indian campaign which must have taken anywhere between 18 to 36 months. It may then be assumed that the conquering hero returned to northern India by 363 A.D. and was confronted by the rebellion of the nine kings. To crush this he must have undertaken several campaigns which could have been completed by 365 A.D. This was celebrated by the performance of a horse sacrifice which was made an occasion for the full display of imperial pomp and pageantry at which a number of subjugated and independent kings must have been asked to be present either in person or through their emissaries.

[28] Majumdar and Altekar, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 144-45.

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The last ten years were spent in consolidating the empire and setting up an efficient administration for it. The Emperor also spent these years in according patronage to learning and literature, poetry and philosophy, the arts and music.

VII

The assumption of the great titles and the performance of the horse sacrifice heralded the formal establishment of the empire. The legends on the coins of Samudra Gupta describe him as "He who has spread his triumph in hundred battles", "the vanquisher of his enemies", "the invincible", "the matchless warrior" and the "Battle-axe of Death" which reveal his war-like personality.[29] The *Asvamedha* coins were issued both to commemorate the performance of the sacrifice and also to assert his claim that he was a great champion of the Vedic religion and Brahmanism. The lyre-type coins show his artistic personality. This practice of adoption of high-sounding titles was first introduced by the Kushans and soon became the vogue and was adopted by the Guptas with evident delight. Most of the early imperial Guptas fully justified the assumption of such great titles by their conquests and patronage to learning, arts and religion.

Thus the invincible Gupta warrior had marched from one corner of the country to another spreading terror in far-flung areas. But the edge of his "Battle-axe of Death" was tempered by consideration of morality and culture and in this the personality of Samudra Gupta stands unrivalled in the history of India. He had marched over 3000 miles and fought over twenty-four kings and was never defeated. He is often called the Indian Napoleon but such a description does him less than justice. For whereas Napoleon's warlike activities finally led him to spend his last years in confinement in St. Helena, Samudra Gupta was in a position to look back on his military career with evident pleasure and satisfaction that the prowess of arms had brought him not only glory but also an empire over which he could lavish his artistic delights and imperial benevolence.

[29] Allan, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 21 ff; also Fleet, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 1-23.

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CHAPTER FOUR

The Quest for Order

SOCIETY, ECONOMY AND CULTURE

THE ESTABLISHMENT of a great empire capable of ensuring peace and security for major areas of northern India was a fact of revolutionary significance in the history of India of the fourth century A.D. The Gupta empire arose from the debris of disintegrating imperial systems and the wreckage of petty principalities. The conditions it tried to replace verged on chaos and anarchy, confusion and disorder. Its first task, then, was to create a new system of order by stabilizing social institutions, encouraging economic growth and ushering a new era of cultural greatness in India. Samudra Gupta is often described as the harbinger of a Golden Age and it is only on a basis of a firm social order, economic prosperity and artistic and literary achievements that the fame of a Golden Age must rest. We shall now examine the ways in which this ideal of a Golden Age was sought to be translated into a vivid reality by the founder of Gupta greatness.

In this quest for order the system of political organization is of primary importance. The state, declared the Grand Old Sage Bhishma in the *Mahabharata,* is "the foundation of individual security (comprising the security of person and property) as well as the stability of the social order, the basis of the great institutions of family and property, the support of the fundamental law of the social order and the guarantee of the normal functioning of the social, the economic and the religious activities of the people."[1] The ancient Indian thinkers displayed a dread of anarchy which

[1] See Ghoshal, U. N., *A History of Indian Political Ideas,* p. 199.

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was so elequently rendered by the term *Matsyanyaya* (the rule of the big fish swallowing the small)[2] and the state owed its origin to the intervention by the Creator to end such a state of things.[3]

Before describing the kind of state that came into existence under the Guptas let us see what the theoretical frame of reference was in the centuries preceding the rise of Samudra Gupta. In the ages before the advent of the Guptas on the political scene there existed a comprehensive body of ideas and ideals pertaining to the state, its origins, nature and functions in ancient India.

Political speculation in ancient India goes back to the time when the early Aryans set up their states in the Punjab, and in the *Rig Veda* (1500 B.C. ?) we see the first and really formative phase of the development of the Indian political theories. But it is Kautilya (*circa* 300 B.C.)[4] who really became the grand philosopher of Indian polity. His work, the *Arthasastra,* exerted such a dominating influence over political thought that in the subsequent ages thinkers simply commented and enlarged upon his system. Such is the nature of political thought in the major *Smritis* like the *Manusmriti* and *Yajnyavalkya smriti*. The major parts and ideas of these codes were finalized between 200 B.C. and 200 A.D. Likewise the Epics assumed, more or less, their present form during the same period.

Before discussing the theoretical ideas in the texts mentioned above let us see what the reality was like as revealed by coins and inscriptions of the period between the decline of the Mauryas and the rise of the Guptas. These reveal that there existed two distinct types of government alongside of each other and these were the monarchies and the republics. Since Vedic times the tribal republics had played a vital part in the political history of ancient India. Some of these republics fought bravely against Alexander the Great and the Greek accounts describe them as both extensive and powerful states. The Buddhist works frequently speak of tribal oligarchies among whom the Licchavis, Sakyas

[2] Samashastry, R., *Kautilya's Arthasastra,* p. 8.

[3] Shantiparvan, *Mahabharata,* XII, 58-12-16.

[4] For a discussion on the date of the *Arthasastra* see Jayaswal, K.P., *Hindu Polity,* pp. 364 ff.; Nilakanta Sastri (ed.), *Op. Cit.,* p. 10; for the view placing the work much later see Jolly, *Kautilya Arthasastram,* Introduction, and more recently H. C. Raychoudhuri, *The Age of Imperial Unity,* pp. 285-87.

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and Mallas were prominent. The growth of Magadhan imperialism under Bimbisara and his successor Ajatashatru threatened the very existence of these oligarchies and the empires of the Nandas and the Mauryas completely eclipsed them. They re-emerge at the time of the decline of the Mauryas and from 200 B.C. onwards until the fifth century A.D. their coins show a continuous history of the existence of the republics.

Though these states were republics they were not democracies in the modern sense of the term. The supreme power was vested in an assembly whose membership was restricted to a small aristocratic class capable of fulfilling the property qualifications which, along with social origin, made them eligible for participation in the work of exercising political power. The common people, the farmers and artisans and other toilers, had scarcely any right to question the decisions of the oligarchy. The assembly was the soverign body and it conducted its proceedings on a basis of equality of all members of the assembly. These assemblies elected the heads of the tribal republics and also appointed numerous other important officials like the judges and revenue collectors and even generals for the tribal armies. The actions of the executive were rigorously controlled by the assembly. The areas under the administration of these republics varied from a few villages to large districts and even provinces.[5] The continuation of the system of tribal republics in the political life of ancient India indicates the vitality and long persistence of the tribal tradition in Indian life. From about the fifth century A.D., however, they decline and there comes about their transformation into monarchies. This process is brought about by a variety of factors like the transformation of tribes into castes, the influence of hereditary succession in some of the most important offices like generals, the inherent instability of a tribal polity challenged by the caste system on the one hand and the monarchies and empire on the other and the growth of factions and lack of secrecy and military and administrative concentration weakening their military and state power. By the time the Gupta empire arises and grows many of these tribal republics are already on their way to becoming monarchies and the extension of the Gupta empire during the

[5] Altekar, *State and Government in Ancient India*, pp. 71 ff.

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time of Chandra Gupta II and his successor (376 to 475 A.D.) sounds their death knell.

The monarchies also witness changes in their ideological and administrative structures through the ages. The small states of the pre-Buddha period were constantly at war with each other. Persistent war helped the formation of the military class which later emerged into the Kshatriya caste against which came the challenge of the sacerdotal caste of the Brahmanas contesting for social supremacy. There existed a significant period of conflict between the Kshatriya and Brahmana castes and its intellectual and social expression is to be found in some aspects of the religious thought of the *Upanishads* and the social content of aspects of the Buddhist and Jaina movements. The rise of the Nandas, and following them the Mauryas, witnessed the consolidation of the military caste into which newer tribal and social groups had found entry. The disintegration of the Maurya empire saw a resurgence of Brahmanism and with it was established and defined a new relationship between the military and sacerdotal elements in Indian society. For the first time, now, we read of new theories of kingship which emphasize the divine nature of the office, if not of the person of the king, coming to the forefront and along with such divine claims are also formulated theories of privileges and immunities for the priestly caste.

This profound change is best seen in a comparison of the Maurya ideas on kingship as revealed in the inscriptions of Asoka and the Gupta ideas on kingship. Asoka, for instance, calls himself *Devanampriya* (Beloved of the gods) but never claims for himself any divine status. His other titles are also equally simple for the most that he claims for himself in the matter of royal dignity is the title "King of the Magadhas".[6] He is the *Raja,* in fact an emperor, who does not feel that he need use even a modest title like *Maharaja* which was common with even minor feudatories of the Gupta age. As against this Samudra Gupta is described as a being human in form only for acting according to the customs and conventions governing this life but otherwise comparable to Kubera, Varuna, Indra, Yama and Brihaspati. He is not only a *Maharaja* but *Rajadhiraja* and *Maharajadhirajasri.*

[6] *Rummindei Pillar Inscription; Bairat Stone Inscription.*

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The change in titles is significant and reflects a change in theories of kingship.

How did this deification of the institution of kingship come about? Though firmly established only in the second century B.C. the trend went much farther back into antiquity. In the Vedic texts the king is described as Indra's companion and an *ardha-deva* (semidivine), a god and a representative of *Prajapati,* the Creator.[7] This line of reasoning is carried to its logical conclusion in later texts where the king "derives his authority by virtue of the divine purpose of his creation and because his office is a symbol of that of the divine ruler".[8] Manu credits the king with eight divine functions and states that he is a divinity because at the time of his coronation he obtained particles from the bodies of the divine guardians of the eight quarters.[9] It will be seen, thus, that the divine theories were present practically at all times but were not accepted fully until after the decline of the Mauryas. During the first century B.C. India witnessed the intrusion of foreign groups like the Greeks, the Scythians and the Kushans and probably it was this influence that facilitated the acceptance of the Brahmanical divine-kingship theories. The Kushans (100 B.C.-200 A.D.) used high-sounding titles like *Daivaputra* (Son of Heaven) which they had borrowed from the Chinese.[10] It may be argued that this divinity, in the case of Indian rulers, was not taken too literally and that assumption of divine titles did not make a king infallible.[11] All the same it is significant that these theories were now generally accepted as a part of the general theory of the state and kingship.

The causes that contributed to the rise and acceptance of these theories may now be generally stated. As warfare increased and became persistent the territories under the control of monarchies became larger. In the Vedic days the basis of loyalty to the king was the tribal bond. As the tribal state was being transformed into a regional state and an ever expanding state, it tended to cross

[7] *Rig Veda,* III, 38, 4; IV, 22,6-7; *Atharva Veda,* XX, 127, 7; *Shatapatha Brahmana,* V, 4, 4, 5.

[8] *Apastamba Dharmasutra,* I, 35, 5; II, 11, 28.

[9] See Ghoshal, *Op. Cit.,* pp. 14, 117.

[10] Majumdar and Altekar, *Op. Cit.,* p. 269, notes 2 & 3.

[11] *Manavadharmasastra,* VII, 45.

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the tribal limits in the composition of its subject population. This had a two-fold effect. The expansion in the territories of the state made the operation of popular assemblies like the *sabha* and *samiti* ever more difficult. Already by 600 B.C. they had started becoming obsolete and were being replaced by the council of ministers or the *mantriparishad*. The disappearance of the popular assemblies led to an enormous increase in the concentration of power of the monarchies the exercise of which was rendered difficult because of the backwardness of the communications and the existence of numerous regional political societies. Kingship thus felt the need for the acquisition of an element of prestige firmly rooted in theological sanction and tradition. This element of prestige had something to do with the elevation in the concept of the personality and prestige of the king which was made manifest in pomp, grandeur and pageantry.

Secondly the inclusion of diverse tribal and regional elements weakened the old basis of loyalty. The transition from the *vish* (tribal settlement) to the *grama* indicated the process of the transformation of Indian society from the tribal to the national stage. By 600 B.C. this society was no longer strictly organized all over on the basis of tribes. It was not only multi-tribal but also multi-racial and multi-cultural. Divinity of kingship was one means of supplanting the old tribal tie. This is shown in the *Mahabharata* argument that though the king is one he is obeyed by many because he derives his authority from the Creator.[12] The king was the representative of *Danda*, that mystic force which governs the world, rewards the virtuous and punishes the wicked. The king, says Kautilya, shall rule the world with the sceptre raised (*udhyatadanda*).[13] The divine kingship, thus, attempted to create a new basis of loyalty for the subjects of the new and bigger states.

The theory of divine kingship also, in a sense, challenged the theory of tribal oligarchies which claimed no divine status. It provided the theological justification for the destruction of these oligarchic republics and, wherever necessary, their easy transition to monarchies. Orthodox Brahmanical political thinkers like Kautilya and Manu showed a distrust of such republican forms of government and advocated their incorporation into monarchies.[14] As

[12] *Mahabharata*, XII, 58, 12-16. [13] Shamasastry, *Op. Cit.*, p. 8.
[14] *Mahabharata*, 107, 27-32; XII, 81, 17; Ghoshal, *Op. Cit.*, p. 147.

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the tribes began to be incorporated into Brahmanical society the divine-kingship theories must have acted as a definite inducement to the leaders of their polities to seek admission and use the theories as a status-symbol.

II

The duties of the king have been elaborately described in the works on polity like the *Arthasastra* and the *Smritis*. According to Kautilya the king is responsible for the protection of his people from external aggression and internal commotion; he must rule in such a way that his treasury is always full, his army alert and his subjects under control and happy.[15] The king must be a patron of religion and culture and strive to ensure that the laws, as laid down in the *smritis,* more particularly the laws relating to the *varnas* and *ashramas* (castes and stages of life). He was expected to perform several sacrifices and distribute gifts to the Brahmanas from time to time, build temples or endow them when temple-worship became common and endow institutions of learning. He was also a patron of the arts and was expected to be able to appreciate good poetry, painting and sculpture and architecture.[16] Harishena, the court poet of Samudra Gupta, praises the kingly qualities almost in ecstatic terms. Samudra Gupta's happy mind, we are told by Harishena, "was accustomed to associate with learned people; he was the supporter of the real truth of the scriptures; upheld religion in its philosophical and practical aspects and even wrote poetry 'which gives free vent to the power of the mind of the poets'. He put to shame (Kashyapa) the preceptor of (Indra) the Lord of the gods, and Tumburu; and Narada, and others, by his sharp and polished intellect and choral skill and musical accomplishments; who established (his) title of 'King of poets' by various poetical compositions that were fit to be the means of subsistance of learned people."[17]

Some of these claims are supported by numismatic evidence. The *Asvamedha* type of Samudra Gupta's coins testify to his devotion to the Vedic cults and his belief in the performance of the sacrifice as a means of winning heaven. The Lyre-type shows the

[15] Shamasastry, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 36-39, 46.
[16] See Kalidasa's *Raghuvamsa,* I, 23-24. [17] Fleet, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 14-15.

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king seated on a low throne playing upon a many-stringed instrument. The tiger-type possibly refers to his love of hunting and the battle-axe type his martial personality. The archer type indicates his proficiency in the art of archery while the standard type shows him dressed in the formal regal garb, looking every inch a proud emperor. His skill in the use of weapons and proficiency in the art of war are described by the Inscription in the following words: he was "skilful in engaging in a hundred battles of various kinds" and "whose only ally was the prowess of the strength of his own arm; who was noted for prowess; whose most charming body was covered over with all the beauty of the marks of a hundred confused wounds, caused by the blows of battle-axes, arrows, spears, pikes, barbed darts, swords, lances, javelins for throwing, iron arrows, *vaitastikas* (scimitar)."[18]

Of his charity the Inscription says that he was gifted with benevolence of heart, was full of compassion for the humble, lowly, poor and destitute about whose welfare his mind was constantly exercised. His generous philanthropy showed itself in many charities, in "gifts of hundred of thousands of cows" and gift of gold as claimed by the Eran Inscription.

His conquests, his cultured mind and splendid personality were such as to make Samudra Gupta an ideal ruler almost in the image of the ideal king of the texts on law and polity. His name became associated with the tradition of royal greatness in the subsequent ages as is evidenced by the introductory portion of a late Javanese text, the *Tantri Kamandaka* which refers to Samudra Gupta in grandiloquent terms.[19]

III

With such an outstanding personality at the helm of affairs, the state administration must have been very efficient and conducive to both economic prosperity and spiritual greatness. The ancient Indian theoreticians envisaged the state as a seven-limbed organism

[18] An echo of this description is found in the legend "Victorious in a hundred battles" inscribed on some of the coins of Samudra Gupta. See *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India,* VIII, p. 44.

[19] See "Literary References to Samudra Gupta", R. C. Majumdar in *I.H.Q.*, IX, pp. 930-33.

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of which the king was the soul and brain directing and controlling its movements. According to Kautilya, the king, ministers, country, forts, treasury, army and friends were the constituent elements of the statal organism.[20] Next in importance to the king, therefore, was the council of ministers and the fact of the existence of such a council is hinted at in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription. The departments of revenue, land, trade, commerce and industry, ecclesiastical affairs and justice were under the supervision of the council of ministers and very often several offices were held simultaneously by a single minister. Thus Harishena, the composer of the Allahabad Pillar Inscription was a foreign minister and also a general, an officer controlling the supervision of the Royal Kitchen, a minister (*Kumaramatya*), chief of the police and a criminal judge. He was the son of Dhruvabhuti who was also a *Mahadandanayaka* (chief of police and criminal judge), which indicates that many offices were then held in hereditary succession. There is also a mention of another *Mahadandanayaka* named Tilabhatta.

We have, thus, four major offices in the imperial administration of the Guptas listed in the Allahabad Inscription. Of these the *Khadyatapakika* seems to be an officer who was in charge of supervision of the Royal Kitchen.[21] This office was quite distinct from that of the *Mahapratihara* who was responsible for the regulation of the court ceremonial and admission to the royal presence.[22] It could not have been a minor office either, since it would be incomprehensible as to why an official who held other very important posts should be saddled with this minor office. Perhaps some light on this may be thrown by an Asokan inscription telling us that "hundreds of thousands of living beings were daily slaughtered in the royal kitchen" until Asoka stopped the practice.[23] Such a mass slaughter must have been undertaken not just to feed the immediate royal family and their daily guests but also to distribute food to the indigent and the hungry every day as a part of royal charity. Since the food cooked in the royal kitchen was intended to be served to the king and his entourage,

[20] Shamasastry, *Op. Cit.*, p. 287.
[21] Mookerji, R. K., *Op. Cit.*, p. 19; Chattopadhyaya, S., *Op. Cit.*, p. 163.
[22] Majumdar and Altekar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 277. [23] *Rock Edict*, I.

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there were also questions of strict security against possibile attempts at murder by poisoning. Kautilya has given a description of the elaborate precautions to be taken when the royal food was being cooked or served.[24] Work of this kind not only demanded that the supervisor should command the confidence of the king but also that he should be an expert on poisons and other possible means of causing harm to the royal person. This was a combination of a security officer's and a chemist's work and in addition to this the person selected for the post must have been also responsible for the distribution of food as charity from the royal kitchen. This office may, then, be equated with that of the Palace or Royal security officer.

The next office is that of the *Sandhivigrahika* which is rendered as minister for peace and war (*sandhi* and *vigraha*). This officer worked in close cooperation with the king and the army and was not only in charge of diplomatic affairs but also responsible for the planning of campaigns, intelligence both diplomatic and military, and general supervision over the state of preparedness of the army.[25] Since the Guptas were concerned with matters all over the country, north as well as south, they must have appointed a *sandhivigrahika* for each major area and presumably Harishena was one such officer. As a diplomat he was concerned with the drafting of treaties and correspondence with other states and this is amply proved in his case from the composition in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription which is a fine instance of classical Sanskrit composition.

Then there was the office of the *Kumaramatya* which is translated by some as minister in attendance of a prince.[26] This has been questioned and it has been stated that the "*kumaramatyas* of the Gupta period formed a class of officers, similar to the modern I.C.S. or I.A.S.; the members of this class used to serve sometimes as district and divisional officers, sometimes as secretariat officials and sometimes as cabinet ministers. Persons who belonged to this service were usually of high birth, often recruited from the members of ex-royal families, which had been super-

[24] Shamasastry, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 41-44.
[25] Majumdar and Altekar, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 279-80.
[26] Chattopadhyaya, S., *Op. Cit.*, p. 163; Mookerji, R. K., *Op. Cit.*, p. 19.

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ceded by the empire. Their posts often used to be hereditary, as those of the ministers."[27]

And finally Harishena was also a *Mahadandanayaka*. This term has been translated as "chief of police and criminal judge". Now, there are references to *Dandadhyakshas* who were judges of the criminal courts and *Dandapashikas* who were police officers.[28] In the military organization we have inscriptional references to *mahaprachanda-dandanayakas* and *Dandanayakas*.[29] On this evidence it seems more probable that Harishena was a military rather than a police official. This would also be a reasonable assumption in view of his other office which had to do so much with problems of war and peace.

The Allahabad Pillar Inscription has practically nothing to say about the administrative organization of the provinces of the empire. However, the inscriptions of the successors of Samudra Gupta provide some significant information on the subject. Unlike the Mauryas, the Guptas tolerated the existence of a number of feudatories many of whom were rulers of large territories. These were the kings who were defeated in wars and were compelled to pay tribute to the Paramount Ruler but were permitted to continue to rule in their own areas as vassals of the empire. This was, probably, the case with the twelve kings of the South who were defeated and reinstated by Samudra Gupta in the course of his Deccan campaign. Generally speaking the extent of autonomy granted to the feudatories was related to the distance between their own states and the heartland of the empire. Those nearest to the heartland were treated merely as imperial officers and their powers were considerably restricted. But those whose kingdoms lay at the periphery enjoyed a greater degree of autonomy and many of them had feudatories of their own. The department of the *Mahasandhivigrahika* kept a close watch on their activities and took prompt measures to counteract rebellious tendencies on the part of the feudatories. As the Allahabad Inscription indicates the feudatories were granted fresh charters to rule over their conquered kingdoms and had to present themselves

[27] Altekar, A. S., *State and Government in Ancient India*, p. 155.
[28] *Ibid.*, p. 152.
[29] *I. A.*, XII, p. 120; *Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Report*, 1911-1912, p. 152.

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at the imperial court from time to time and also offer daughters in marriage to the princes of the imperial family.

III

The empire was divided into provinces probably called *Deshas*. Over these ruled the viceroys appointed by the emperor. The viceroys were responsible for the maintenance of internal peace and security and to keep the feudatories within their provinces under adequate control. They were also responsible for keeping public works like roads and irrigational facilities in good order and were assisted by departments closely modelled on the lines of those at the centre.

The provinces were divided into units called *Bhuktis* "about the size of the Commissioner's divisions in modern times".[30] These were administered by *Uparikas* who were appointed by the emperor himself. A number of such *Bhuktis* are mentioned in the inscriptions of the Imperial Guptas. There was, thus, the Tirabhukti (modern Darbhanga Division), Pundravardhana-bhukti (Dinajpur, Bogra and Rajashahi districts in northern Bengal), Magadhabhukti (Gaya, Rajagriha and Pataliputra areas). A *bhukti* comprised several *vishayas* administered by the *Vishayapati* who was normally appointed by the *Uparika* but sometimes by the emperor himself when they had the title of a *Maharaja*. The *Bhuktis* and *Vishayas* had their seals several of which have been found.

The district administrator, the *Vishayapati,* was, thus, a pivot of Gupta administration on the lower levels. He belonged to the cadre of officers called the *Kumaramatyas* and had a number of officers serving under him. He maintained the records of lands and public accounts and kept himself in close touch with the people through consultation with the leading commercial and artisan elements in his district. These were the writers, bankers and chief artisan who were members of the *Vishaya* council and were called the *Vishayamahattaras*. Besides these commercial and industrial elements others like the Brahmanas were also associated with the district council.[31]

[30] Majumdar and Altekar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 283.
[31] See *I.A.*, XXXIX, pp. 195 ff. and *JAHRS*, VI, pp. 17 ff.

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The district administration functioned through a numerous bureaucracy comprising officers like the *Yuktas, Ayuktas, Niyuktas, Vyapritas* and *Adhikritas*. Most of these were concerned with the work of collection of revenue. The *Arthasastra* mentions a class of officers called the *yuktas* in a somewhat lower category and employed in all departments and Asoka refers to such officers working in the accounts department of his administration.[32] It is not clear as to what was the precise distinction between the *yuktas, ayuktas* and *niyuktas* nor is it very clear what the duties of the *vyapritas* and the *adhikritas* were. Then there were the *Dandapashikas,* the *Choroddharanikas,* the *Chatas* and the *Bhatas* who served in the departments of law-enforcement, apprehended criminals and worked to maintain law and order. The department of justice was called the *Ayayadhikarana* or *Dharmadhikarana* or the *Dharmasasanadhikarana* which functioned at the district centres and administered justice.[33] Alongside of these official courts there also functioned the popular courts which worked under the auspices of guilds and the village and town communities.

The administration of the towns was the responsibility of an officer called the *Purapala* who enjoyed the status of a *kumaramatya*. There were also the town councils which aided the imperial officer in the work of administration and taxation and public works. The villages were under the *Gramyeka* or the *Gramadhyaksha* who was assisted by the *Panchamandali* or the *Gramajanapada,* the panchayats of the ancient days.

IV

The picture of administration that we get from the inscriptions is one of efficiency and benevolence. It is clear that the administrative system of the Guptas was much more decentralised than that of the Mauryas and the reasons for this may now be briefly noted. In the first instance the historical circumstances under which the two empires arose were radically different. Chandra-

[32] *Arthasastra,* II, 5; *Rock Edict,* III.

[33] Seals of these offices have been found at Nalanda and Vaishali; *M.A.S.I.,* No. 66, pp. 52-53; *A.S.I.,* 1913-1914, p. 128; *E.I.,* XI, p. 107; Majumdar & Altekar, *Op. Cit.,* p. 287.

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gupta secured the empire of the Nandas by assassinating Dhana Nanda and succeeded to the empire that had already destroyed a number of local dynasties. In the case of Chandra Gupta I the foundation of the Gupta empire was laid through a matrimonial and political alliance of two distinct political entities, namely, the kingdom of the Guptas and the political system of the Licchavis. Samudra Gupta began to build on this foundation through conquests in the surrounding territories and we have seen how he had to battle against numerous chiefs who must have been already well-established before the Guptas came on the imperial scene. Samudra Gupta displaced the Naga and other kings of northern India but exacted only token tributes from the south Indian kings. For this there were several reasons. Samudra Gupta's conquests in the north were only recent and there too lived many tribal republics and the Saka and Kushana chiefs in western and north-western India. Practical reasons then, dictated prudence in not annexing slices of territory that could be held with difficulty in the incipient stages of the empire. Secondly the social and economic organization had undergone a great change since the days of the Mauryas. As Kosambi argues there had also grown a system of "feudalism from above" which he defines as a "state wherein an emperor or powerful king levied tribute from subordinates who still ruled in their own right and did what they liked within their own territories as long as they paid the paramount ruler. These subordinate rulers might even be tribal chiefs, and seem in general to have ruled the land by direct administration, without the intermediacy of a class which was in effect a landowning stratum."[34] The existence of a number of such feudatories is indicated in the Gupta inscriptions. In the case of Chandra Gupta II, the successor of Samudra Gupta, we have the name of a Sanakanika Maharaja[35] who, obviously, was a ruler of the tribe of the Sanakanikas mentioned in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudra Gupta. Now, it is interesting to note that whereas the Sanakanikas are described as a tribe during the time of Samudra Gupta a decade later they already seem to have developed the institution of a Maharaja showing how rapidly the process of

[34] Kosambi, D. D., *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, p. 275.

[35] Fleet, *Op. Cit.*, p. 21.

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transformation of the republican tribes into monarchies of the "feudal" type was being wrought. It is possible that this stage was reached by the Sanakanikas already during the time of Samudra Gupta but the fiction of the republic was kept alive. It was no longer necessary to maintain that fiction even during the time of Chandra Gupta II.

There seem to be two reasons for the development of this particular type of polity which resulted in the concept of an empire which was but a loose confederation of more or less independent states. The first reason seems to be the dissolution of the Mauryan imperial system with its centralized bureaucracy served by a hierarchy of centrally appointed and controlled officers. This system was replaced by the Satrapal system introduced by the Scythians and popularized in large areas of western and northern India under the Kushans. The Satrapal system was first organized by the Medo-Persian emperors like Cyrus and Cambyses and perfected by Darius I. Darius organized his vast empire into a number of satrapies ruled by highranking officers many of whom were either members of the royal family or related to it by marriage. Though in theory the satraps were appointed by the emperor and their tenure of office depended on his will, in practice there was a tendency for the satrapal office to become hereditary. These satraps were given large powers in civil and judicial administration and had the right to maintain armed forces. Some of them even entertained representatives of foreign powers in the neighbouring areas and decided on possible action on their own initiative referring to the central authority only in certain cases. With such vast powers in their hands and backed as they were by military force, it was natural for the satraps to entertain ambitions of becoming independent and under the weak successors of Darius many of them did just do that. Alexander the Great understood the weaknesses of the system but since the time at his disposal was very short he attempted to work it in a modified form. But his satraps also declared themselves independent and this tendency was evinced in the case of the Parthians and the Scythians. The Scythians and the Kushans introduced and strengthend the system in India during the early centuries of the Christian era.[36]

[36] Nilakanta Sastri, K. A., *A Comprehensive History of India*, II, pp. 263-64.

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The hereditary nature of certain important offices and the enormous increase in their power were the two conditions that created the very special kind of "feudalism" in ancient India during the interval between the Maurya and the Gupta empires. When Samudra Gupta began to rule there already were in existence several feudal overlords who had assumed the status of independent rulers. These dynastic rulers may have been feudatory to the Kushans and on their decline declared themselves independent until they were once again subjugated by the Guptas. But the Guptas did not overthrow them completely except in cases noted by the Allahabad Pillar Inscription. In many cases some of these feudal lords accepted offices under the imperial administration and it was, probably, in that capacity that the Sanakanika Maharaja of the time of Chandra Gupta II is mentioned in the inscription referred to above. It has been inferred that this mention of the feudatory of Chandra Gupta II must be taken in the sense of his accompanying the imperial master in his campaign against the Sakas of western India.[37] In that case it is certain that it was one of the duties of the feudatories to accompany the emperor on his expeditions whenever called upon to do so. We see here, then, a combination of military and civil power in the hands of the feudatories which must have been a carry-over from the satrapal stage in the administrative history of ancient India in the pre-Gupta centuries.

Fa-Hian, the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim, who travelled in India only a few decades after the passing away of Samudra Gupta, gives us a picture of a benign government. He says that in the Middle Country (Madhya Desha) the climate "is warm and equable, without frost or snow. The people are very well off, without poll-tax or official restrictions. Only those who till the royal lands return a portion of profit of the land. If they desire to go, they go; if they like to stop they stop. The kings govern without corporal punishment; criminals are fined according to circumstances, lightly or heavily. Even in cases of repeated rebellion they only cut off the right hand. The king's personal attendants, who guard him on the right and left, have fixed salaries."[38] The general air of prosperity, peace and well-being of the country is well-re-

[37] Majumdar & Altekar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 167.

[38] Beal, S., Chinese Accounts of India, *The Travels of Fa-Hian*, p. 21.

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flected in this description. The absence of serfdom and the fact that Fa-Hian was not robbed anywhere on his travels whereas his successor Hiuen-Tsang who followed him into India in the seventh century had quite a few unpleasant experiences, attests to the effectiveness of the Gupta administrative machinery.

V

Samudra Gupta is described as the "supporter of the real truth of the scriptures" (*sastra-tattvarth*) and is portrayed as a devout Brahmanist.[39] From his inscription it is clear that he was deeply learned in the religious and social tradition of his time and strove to uphold the social order envisaged in the law-books. This social order was characterized by the existence of the four *varnas* and the four *ashramas*. The system of the four major castes is first hinted at in the *Purusha sukta* of the tenth mandala of the *Rig Veda* where the four orders are described as having sprung from the different parts of the Cosmic Man. Many scholars have argued that this hymn is a later interpolation though it is fairly certain that the institution of the *Varnas* had already come into existence as early as 1000 B.C. When the Aryans first arrived in India they were sharply distinguished from the indigenous population by differences in race, religion and social organization. Moreover, the Aryans were the conquerors and had subjugated a large number of the non-Aryan population. They practised slavery and took many of the non-Aryans as slaves through war and conquest. The term *varna* was, thus, used in a racial sense indicating the two racial orders in the emergent Indian society. Within the Aryan society itself there was going on an occupational specialization with professions tending to be passed down the generations in a hereditary succession. The first occupation to become so specialized was that of priesthood and the priestly class began to crystallize into a distinct caste. It was followed in this by the class of warriors some of whom were becoming professional fighters and bureaucrats due to continuous war and the gradual extension in the territories held by the early kingdoms. The kshatriya, then, also began to assume characteristics of a caste and vied with the priestly caste for social leadership and privileges. The rest of the

[39] Fleet, *Op. Cit.*, p. 11.

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Aryan population which belonged neither to the priestly nor to the warrior groups was described as the Vaishyas (literally the inhabitants of a *vish* or an early Aryan settlement) and followed the occupations of farming and work in the industrial arts. At first these divisions were purely functional and flexible but hardened into castes as time passed by. The fourth group, which lived on the periphery of Aryan society was that of the *Dasas* or slaves who had no rights of their own and lived on sufferance. This class was gradually transformed into the Shudra caste in later ages. Though *varna* started with the idea of preservation of racial purity there was going on an inter-mixture between the Aryans and non-Aryans and very soon the term lost its original meaning though the fiction was maintained in the subsequent ages. Buddhism and Jainism came as revolts of the underprivileged classes led by the Kshatriyas who were interested in contesting the Brahmana claim to supremacy and were glad of assistance from the Vaishyas and the Shudras in this conflict. This rebellion succeeded for a time but very soon Brahmanism contained it and in the first century of the Christian era Brahmanism was clearly on the offensive and Buddhism began to lose ground and following. This Brahmanical revival is reflected in the major *Smritis* like the Manava, Vishnu and Gautama *dharmasastras* which began to assume their present form sometime during the period 200 B.C.-200 A.D. They reflect a social organization divided into four major groups, the Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras and also indicate the beginnings of the institution of untouchability through the prescription of rules and regulations concerning rites of purification consequent upon contact with certain undesirable categories and social classes like the Chandalas. But it is also obvious that though the theory explained the existence of four social divisions there were in existence many more castes than four and Manu ingeniously explains their rise as a result of mixing among the castes.[40]

Before the rise of the Gupta empire, then, the caste system

[40] Perhaps the most exhaustive account of the early historical development of the caste system will be found in Dutt, N. K., *Origin and Growth of Caste in India*, I; Ghurye, G. S., *Caste and Class in India*, is a valuable work on the growth of the system through the ages and the changes that occurred in it through the different periods.

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had already developed its broad features. The duties of the various castes were also fixed and these have been enumerated in more or less identical terms by writers from Kautilya to Shukra. These duties were: for the Brahmana, study, teaching, performance of sacrifices, officiating at sacrifices and giving and receiving gifts; for the Kshatriya, study, performance of sacrifices, giving gifts, military occupations and protection of life and property of others; for the Vaishya, study, performance of sacrifices, giving gifts, agriculture, cattle-breeding, trade, profession of artisans and court-bards.[41] Two or three points need some notice here. First the profession of arms is normally restricted to the Kshatriyas which would mean the disarming and demilitarization of some 80 per cent of the population. Secondly the difference between the prescribed duties of the Vaishyas and the Shudras in occupational terms is negligible. The Vaishyas have ritual and study, rites denied to the Shudras, but as far as the occupations are concerned the one could be easily mixed with the other. And this was what actually did happen. It meant an elevation for the Shudra but social subsidence for the Vaishya. It clearly indicates that the Shudra group was then firmly accepted as a division of the society and that the prescription of occupations like farming, cattle-breeding and artisanship for the Shudra eliminated the necessity of a wide-spread use of institutionalized slavery. Slavery was known in ancient India and we have descriptions of numerous categories of slaves like those taken in war, debt-slaves, etc.[42] But the incidence of slavery in ancient India was mild and restricted compared to the wide-spread existence and use of institutionalized slavery in Greece and Rome. Obviously the caste system, in its operation, eliminated to a large extent, the need for its use in ancient India. Thirdly, even though the theoretical assumptions indicate a state of extreme rigidity, in reality the system was much more fluid in its form as is shown by inscriptional evidence. The system was open enough to assist in the assimilation of external groups like the Licchavis and the Guptas and that inter-caste marriages, at least in the ruling circles, were frequent. The newly assimilated groups were generally accommodated within the Ksha-

[41] *Arthasastra*, p. 7.

[42] See *Ibid.*, III, 13; *Narada Dharmasastra*, V, pp. 25-28; *Manavadharmasastra*, VIII, 415.

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triya caste if they happened to possess political or military power or in the Shudra group if they were valuable as workers and artisans but a few were also admitted to the status of Brahmanas. The Satavahanas and the Vakatakas are examples of such additions to the Brahmana group.

The lines separating one caste from another were still in a state of fluidity. We have evidence of inter-marriages and sharing of food in common between the Kshatriya and Brahmana groups during the age under review.[43] For instance, a daughter of Chandra Gupta II, the successor of Samudra Gupta was married to Rudrasena II, the Vakataka ruler who belonged to the Brahmana caste. This state of affairs continued even after the Gupta age but increasingly such instances of crossing the caste lines in matrimonial alliances were exceptions than the rule in subsequent times. The same fluidity characterized the condition of the Shudras. Here the priestly theoretical bark was worse than the bite of economic and social reality. Actually, it has been argued, that during the Gupta period, the religious rights of the Shudras were enhanced which may be an indication of a better economic status. For, permission to participate in religious ritual must have been closely associated with ability to pay for it and thus add to the income of the priests. There was an increase in the rate of payment of wages paid to Shudra labourers and artisans and slaves and hired labourers were gradually becoming share-croppers and peasants. This elevation in the economic and social status of the Shudras affected the Vaishyas as well as a new class of untouchables, as will be seen presently.[44]

There seems to be a growing spirit of vegetarianism in the country at this time. Fa-Hian observes that "throughout the country the people kill no living thing nor drink wine, nor do they eat garlic or onions, with the exception of the Chandalas only. The Chandalas are named 'evil men' and dwell apart from others; if they enter a town or market, they sound a piece of wood in order to separate themselves; then men, knowing who they are, avoid coming in contact with them. In this country they do not keep swine nor fowls, and do not deal in cattle; they have

[43] See Altekar, A. S., "Society in the Deccan during 200 B.C. to 500 A.D.,", *J.I.H.*, XXX, I (April 1952), p. 61.

[44] See Sharma, R. S., *Sudras in Ancient India*, pp. 278-89.

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no shambles or wine-shops in their market-places. In selling they use cowrie shells. The Chandalas only hunt and sell flesh."[45] Though this is obviously an oversimplified and one-sided account of reality it does reflect a growing puritanism. The use of flesh and wine had been forbidden by the *Smritis* to the Brahmanas.[46] This was partly due to the Brahmana's desire to maintain his own ceremonial purity and partly due to his pretensions to being the purest and the most elevated caste in Indian society. It is possible that the Brahmana caste did observe a strict vegetarianism and abstained from the use of intoxicating drinks in this age. There must also be considered the effect of the Buddhist and Jainistic practices. Buddhism prohibited the use of liquors and intoxicating drinks for laymen and monks and nuns alike while Jainism emphasized the supreme virtue of a strict vegetarian diet. There were also growing ideas about pure and impure substances and their effect on ceremonial purity. All these factors created an aversion to the use of meat and strong drink and total abstinence in these was mandatory for the priestly class which set itself up as the highest caste in society. Naturally approximation to the norms of behaviour of the priestly caste was considered a mark of social elevation and the non-Brahmana castes gradually tried to model their dietary and other habits on the lines of those of the Brahmana caste. Along with the ideas of the inherent impurity of meat as an article of food there arose the aversion to occupations concerned with the procuring and selling of meat and these occupations then, became the monopoly of the socially depressed castes like the Chandalas.

Fa-Hian's observations also contain, perhaps, the first historically dated and ascertained case of life-long untouchability when he speaks of the condition of life of the Chandalas. Originally the Chandalas must have been a group of trappers, fishermen and hunters outside the pale of Brahmanical civilization and living on its periphery. Manu ascribes the origin of the caste to intermarriage between a Shudra and a Brahmana woman[47] which is ingenious but unconvincing. The opprobrium associated with the

[45] Beal, S., *Op. Cit.*, p. 21. [46] Ghurye, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 179-80.

[47] *Manavadharmasastra*, X, 11ff.; For an interesting speculation on the probable origins of untouchability see Parui, S. S., "Untouchability in the Early Indian Society", *J.I.H.*, XXXIX, I (April 1961), pp. 1-11.

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marriage of a Brahmana woman to a Shudra was so great that the progeny of such unions was swiftly condemned to the lowest rungs of the social ladder. This group was considered so low in the hierarchy that even its contact was polluting. The institution of untouchability began with the exaggerated notions of ceremonial purity and was influenced by an incursion of primitive magical ideas and their influence on Brahmanical thinking. Already as early as the time of the Buddha the Brahmanas had begun to put forward claims of purity which denounced the Chandala as an unclean person and in the centuries following the Buddha the disabilities of these classes increased. Ceremonial impurity was gradually transformed into life-long uncleanliness and by 400 A.D. this transition in the case of the Chandala, at least, was complete as Fa-Hian's observations show. With the rise of life-long untouchability the decisive step on the path of becoming a rigid caste-bound society was taken.

The king was expected to uphold the rule of the *Varnas* and their concomitants, the *Jatis*, by the *Sastras*. We have no means of knowing whether Samudra Gupta, learned as he is claimed to be by his court official, did exert his royal power in the cause of the preservation of the caste-distinctions. As a member of a clan that was newly converted to Brahmanism it is reasonable to suppose that he may have acted enthusiastically in support of the *Sastras*. If this assumption is valid then it may be surmised that the Guptas were responsible for the emergence of a triumphant Brahmanism both as a theological system as well as a social arrangement. In this context they were the first architects of the present-day Hindu society.

VI

Let us now survey the economic conditions of the times. Agriculture was the economic basis of this society whose primary unit of organization was the village. There has been considerable difference of opinion about the precise nature of ownership of land in ancient India. It has been argued, on the strength of statements in the *Smritis* that all land belonged to the king.[48] As against this there is sufficient evidence to show that rights of private property

[48] *Manavadharmasastra*, VIII, 39.

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were not only recognized but also guaranteed in the political thought of ancient India.[49] In the inscriptional evidence of the Gupta age we find conditions wherein ownership of land was recognized both as private or vested in the joint family or in the village. The farmers had secure rights of tenure and in reality they exercised many rights of ownership even where rights of property other than strict private ownership were conceded.[50] Certain categories of land did belong to the king and among these may be included land not brought under the plough and lands which contained treasure-troves and Kautilya clearly recognizes some categories of land as crown lands for which there prevailed an entirely different incidence of assessment.[51]

The existence of private ownership over farm lands, however, was hedged around by numerous factors which limited the enjoyment of that right. There was also a growing tendency for kings to donate entire villages "for religious and charitable purposes. These donations undoubtedly indicate that the king had the supreme ownership over the whole village; otherwise he could not transfer such comprehensive rights over the whole village in such a way. Moreover, in these cases the donees not only acquired the right to receive a certain amount of the royal revenues, but in some occasions, they also enjoyed all kinds of royal dues which are often specifically recorded in the inscriptions. It is not stated in any inscription that they had the right to dispossess peasants at will, and we assume that this right was not accorded to them, though no doubt they could punish or evict tenants who refused to pay their dues."[52]

There had, thus, arisen a new class between the king and the actual farmers and this comprised religious institutions as well as retainers. In this wise, then, India was witnessing a very special kind of feudalism, non-heriditary in character in the enjoyment of economic privileges and of military duties wherever applicable, but all the same a class of intermediaries who became an additional burden on the farmer.[53] This system developed rapidly

[49] See Altekar, A. S., *State and Government in Ancient India*, pp. 199 ff.
[50] Maity, S. K., *The Economic Life of Northern India in Gupta Period*, pp. 16-18.
[51] *Arthasastra*, II, 24.
[52] Maity, *Op Cit.*, pp. 16-17.
[53] For a discussion on inscriptional evidence on this kind of feudalism

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through the Gupta Age though we have no means of knowing precisely if it already existed during the time of Samudra Gupta. Under this system, then, the king stood at the head of a "feudal" hierarchy and was served by a number of vassals who controlled land in various ways. These vassals were known as *Samantas, Mandalikas, Bhogikas* and sometimes held high official positions. They issued grants donating lands to Brahmanas and others and had under them their own feudatories and when the central power declined, alienated land controlled by them without any obvious reference to the overlord.[54] It has been surmised that the transformation of the Shudras from the position of slaves and hired labourers into a class of farmers was a fact of crucial importance in the rise of feudalism in India.[55] But this would require a much more closer examination of all relevant evidence than has been attempted hitherto. This feudalism, it must be emphasized, was generically different from that prevalent in Medieval Europe in that the Indian feudal lords did not own the land they controlled and there were also differences in military and other obligations on their part.

The land revenue collected by the state from the peasant is traditionally described as 1/6th of the produce. Though in actual practice it varied from 8 to 32 percent.[56] It was paid in kind, as Fa-Hian mentions that the normal medium of exchange was not metal currency but cowrie shells.[57] Failure to pay taxes promptly could result in loss of tenure. But land-tax alone would not be sufficient for the financial needs of an empire and in addition to this the state collected a large variety of other taxes. Industrial occupations, trade and commerce, proceeds from crown lands and waste lands, taxes on grazing of cattle and collection of forest produce, mines and navigation—all of these were made to yield their quota to the imperial exchequer. Kautilya, and other writers following him, show an endless ingenuity in devising items of taxation and we can safely infer that the administration of Samudra

see Choudhary, R., "Some Historical Aspects of Feudalism in Ancient India", *J.I.H.*, XXXVII, III, and XXXVIII, I (April 1960), pp. 193-203.

[54] *Ibid.*, pp. 195-9.

[55] Sharma, R. S., *Journal of Social and Economic History of the Orient*, I, p. 298.

[56] *Manavadharmasastra*, VIII, 130; Altekar, A. S., *Op. Cit.*, p. 196.

[57] Beal, S., *Op. Cit.*, p. 21.

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Gupta used all these sources of income. If the sources of income to the state were numerous, the number of expenses it had to incur were not few. The army took away about 50 per cent of the money available for the state budget. For extensive campaigns the amount spent must have been even greater. The campaigns of Samudra Gupta must have cost enormous amounts for the recruitment and equipment of a large army. The number of weapons mentioned in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription makes an impressive reading. They included battle-axes (a weapon specially favoured by the Emperor himself since he is described as *Kritanta-parashu*—wielder of the Battle-axe of Death—on some of his coins), bows and arrows, spears and pikes, swords and lances, barbed-darts and javelins.[58] The traditional Indian army is described as four-fold comprising infantry, chariots, elephants and cavalry. The Gupta army had a large officer-corp and the inscriptions tell us of at least ten different ranks of officers in the imperial army. Besides these there were the armies maintained by the vassals. During the interval between the fall of the Maurya empire and rise of the Guptas, India had witnessed a series of invasions by the Greeks, the Parthians, Scythians and the Yueh-Chi and these had introduced elements of a new strategy and army-organization and these were incorporated into the Gupta military system. We find a more frequent use of horses lending a larger degree of mobility to the army and also the use of a heavier type of armour. The strategy was one of movement rather than a war of fixed positions and the army employed larger numbers.[59]

These armies, then, were an expensive proposition and the amount of money spent for their upkeep must have easily accounted for 50 per cent of the budget if not more. Of course, successful expeditions brought their own rewards in the form of additional tribute from the vanquished and this helped lessen the burden of the army from the immediate subjects.

Of the other items of expenditure the personal expenses of the emperor must have accounted for some 10 per cent; administrative expenses accounted for another 10 per cent. As much as 20 per cent may have been spent on nation-building activities including

[58] Fleet, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 17-18.

[59] See Majumdar, B. K., *The Military System in Ancient India*, pp. 80-91.

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donations to religious and cultural endowments, and the rest went into the reserves. This predilection for setting aside large surpluses for reserves was quite common through major periods of Indian history and it may be surmised that the Guptas were not an exception to this general trend.[60]

In spite of the fact that the court, army and the administrative services consumed large parts of the budget the fact remains that in the matter of nation-building activities the state in ancient India was inclined to set aside some 20 per cent of its revenue. To this must be added another 5 per cent which may have come from the expenses allocated for the court for the Gupta rulers were undoubtedly charitably disposed and distributed their patronage evenly between religion, learning and the arts. It was during the Gupta Age that the famous University of Nalanda began its career and this institution was richly endowed by kings and other donors. Samudra Gupta was interested in poetry and very likely invited the outstanding poets of his times to the court. And the Allahabad Inscription tells us that he disributed his gifts among the lowly and the poor, the destitute and the afflicted. He was compassionate towards those who were underprivileged and was, especially mindful of the needs of Brahmanas and other religious people.[61] That his patronage was not restricted to his own religion is indicated by a tradition that the great Buddhist philosopher Vasubandhu was at the Gupta court at this time. This tradition has been questioned by some scholars but there is nothing inherently improbable in it.[62]

The coins issued during the time of Samudra Gupta reflect the prosperity of the empire. The execution and styles of these will be discussed below. Of relevance here is the fact that the weight of these coins is about 123 grains and their gold content as much as 87 per cent.[63] Such coins of substantial precious metal content and excellent craftsmanship would indicate great prosperity but it would seem that this prosperity had not filtered down to the lowest levels proportionately. We have referred earlier to the statement of Fa-Hian that the common people used cowrie-shells as a medium of exchange which would go to show that even copper

[60] Altekar, A. S., *Op. Cit.*, pp. 212-14. [61] Fleet, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 7-10.
[62] See Majumdar and Altekar, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 156-7, Note 2.
[63] Maity, *Op. Cit.*, p. 206, Table II (b).

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coins were commonly beyond the reach of large masses of the people. This prosperity, therefore, was a characteristic of the aristocratic and rich mercantilist classes and the common people had to be content with a life of few wants and fewer opportunities to satisfy them. But they were both patient and content, for the incidence of crime, as the Chinese observer reports, was low. The Gupta emperor certainly gave his empire a regimen of peace and security and under these conditions trade and commerce, as well as industry and the arts, were bound to show great progress. That progress was shown during the subsequent regimes of Chandra Gupta II and his successor Kumara Gupta I.

Practically nothing has survived of the art and architecture of the time of Samudra Gupta. Most of the existing remains are attributed to a period beginning from *ca.* 400 A.D. onward and these, properly speaking, are outside the scope of the present work. However, we may notice some general tendencies which must have already begun even during the time of Samudra Gupta, if not earlier.

The earliest Gupta coins belong to the time of Chandra Gupta I and are represented by the type on the obverse of which the figures of the king and the queen are shown. The king is dressed after the style of the Kushans wearing a coat and trousers which was an innovation in Hindu India. Both the obverse and reverse sides of the coins betray the strong Kushan influence indicating the fact that early Gupta coinage of this period was not yet able to free itself from the influences of its foreign predecessors. However, there are already trends initiated which gradually help in the evolution of a purely Indian, and Gupta style. The Greek legend on the Kushana coins is now replaced by the Brahmi and the Goddess Adroksho is replaced by the Hindu Lakshmi. With Samudra Gupta new types are introduced and the art of coinage becomes fully Indianized in its types and motiffs. The Archer, Battle-Axe, Couch, Tiger-slayer and Horse-Sacrifice types are all original in conception and design. Their execution is of a very accomplished kind revealing the mastery acquired by the Gupta artist in the matter of casting coins. There is also great poetic and artistic originality shown in the use of *birudas* or titles which are composed in classical Sanskrit. Harishena's *Prashasti* engraved on the Allahabad Pillar is a fine example of classical Sanskrit

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composition heralding the great age of Sanskrit literature ushered in by the Guptas.[64]

It is generally held that Kalidasa, the greatest of Sanskrit poets, lived during the Gupta Age, between *ca.* 360-420 A.D. This is, however, challenged by others who argue that the poet lived in the first century B.C. The weight of internal evidence suggests that the later date is the more probable. The tradition that Kalidasa revised the poem *Setubandha* composed by Pravara-sena of the Vakataka dynasty also lends support to the view that the poet, in all probability, lived during the time of Chandra Gupta II. He is the author of six works of which four are poetical works and two dramas. These are the *Ritusamhara, Meghaduta, Kumara-sambhava* and the *Raghuvamsha* and the *Malavikagnimitram* and *Shakuntala,* the two dramatic works. Kalidasa reveals his mastery over the use of the rich classical medium, his sense of restraint and gracefulness have been unequalled and he is rightly described as the master of Sanskrit poetry.

The same urge for complete Indianization and classicism is expressed in sculpture. The Sarnath Buddha image is the finest example of Gupta Art at its maturity and classical grace where technique and spirit fuse with each other to create sublime beauty out of intractable stone. Gupta art is rightly described as "a flower of established tradition, a polished and perfected medium" for the treatment of thought and feeling. Through it are expressed the abiding spiritual values and the sensitivity to beauty of form for which ancient India is so justly well-known.

[64] Majumdar and Altekar, *Op. Cit.,* pp. 301-5.

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CHAPTER FIVE

The Pale of Religion

THE Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudra Gupta describes him as a builder of the pale of religion—*"dharma-prachira bandah"*[1]—revealing another facet of his extraordinarily rich personality. He was the "supporter of the real truth of the scriptures" and a "giver of many hundreds of thousands of cows" to the Brahmanas. His coins tell us that he performed a horse sacrifice and perhaps no other king of ancient India had greater political justification for it.[2] The substitution of the *Garuda* standard for the *Chakra* used on the coins of Kacha is probably intended as a testimony to the emperor's Vaishnava leaning.[3] In all these indications, then, we have the evidence of the resurgence of Brahmanism and the sects associated with Puranic Hinduism in the Gupta Age.

The Guptas are commonly described as the devotees of a revived Brahmanism and both Vaishnavism and Shaivism are well represented among the royal votaries of the dynasty. This revival of Brahmanism, which reached its culmination in the Gupta Age, was a long process. Buddhism and Jainism represented a reaction against the ancient Vedic faith and especially against the domination of the Brahmanical priesthood. The old Vedic sacrifices had become meaningless and wasteful to large segments of the popula-

[1] Fleet, *Op. Cit.*, p. 6.

[2] The Poona Plates of Prabhavati Gupta, the grand daughter of Samudra Gupta, mention that he performed many horse sacrifices. *Epigraphia Indica*, XV, 41.

[3] See Mookerji, R. K., *The Gupta Empire*, p. 27.

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ation especially among the Vaishyas and the Shudras, and when the Buddha denounced sacrifices and preached moral effort as a means of salvation, he had willing converts to his view.[4] Buddhism began as a monastic movement for in the first stage of the development of the creed there was little, if any, place within its fold for the laymen and laywomen. The early ideal of *Nirvana* could not be realized without renouncing the household life which is repeatedly described in the Buddhist works as a "hole and corner". Gradually, however, under the pressure of circumstances and due to the universal nature of the Buddhist creed the laity came to be included among the following and a special idea, that of Devahood or heaven, was placed before them. Buddhism, thus developed into a religion of the broad masses of the people.[5]

But it cannot be assumed that Buddhism ever became the sole religion of the people of India sharply distinguished from all others at all levels of belief and practice. Among the lay people, Brahmanical and Buddhist, there were scarcely any barriers which would prevent free social intercourse including intermarriages. The inscriptions of Sanchi and Barhut as well as numerous others of subsequent ages indicate the fact that the differences were mainly on the monastic level where the Buddhist *Samgha* was sharply distinguished from the Brahmanical priesthood by divergencies in philosophy and ritual observances. Brahmanism survived the Buddhist onslaught and in this task of survival it tended to assimilate popular cults like Vaishnavism and Shaivism which were developing alongside of Buddhism through the centuries. The Brahmanization of the Epics, the Law Codes and worship of popular deities like Vishnu and Shiva, Krishna and Rama is an evidence of Brahmanism's bid for survival and reemergence. It was in the second century B.C. that the reemergence of Brahmanism in its political as well as social aspects is most apparent. The first Shunga, Pushyamitra, performed two horse sacrifices in the same capital city of Pataliputra from where in an earlier age Asoka, the Maurya, had issued his edict prohibiting the slaughter

[4] For denunciation of Brahmanical ritual and sacrifices in Pali literature see Kandaraka Sutta of the *Majjhima Nikaya*, I, p. 344, *Sutta Nipata*, *S.B.E.*, X, p. 26.

[5] For a detailed discussion of the development of Buddhism as a religion see the author's *Buddhism and Asoka*, Chap. IV.

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of animals for sacrificial purposes.[6] And this reemergence of Vedic ritual was not restricted to Magadha alone. In the distant Deccan the Satavahana ruler, Satakarni I (*ca.* 194-185 B.C.) is described as having performed the horse sacrifice and many other Vedic rites.[7] In the Berar and Central Provinces areas the Vakatakas also performed many Vedic rites and the same holds true of the Bharashiva-Nagas in the third century A.D.[8]) The same trend was also evident in the Andhra country and farther south from the early decades of the third century A.D. The Ikshvakus, Brihatphalayanas, Salankayanas, the Pallavas and the Kadambas were all enthusiastic in their support of Brahmanism.[9] This evidence is significant as it throws light on a very interesting religious and social development in the history of the country before the rise of the Imperial Guptas.

Firstly the evidence shows that the Brahmanical revival which began in the second century B.C. continued undiminshed in subsequent ages. Secondly this revival was almost national in its scope since we find that the performance of Vedic rites and worship of deities like Vishnu-Krishna, Shiva and the Sun-god was becoming common in almost all areas of the country, north and south, east and west. Thirdly, though the revival ostensibly began with the *coup d'état* brought about by a scion of an old Vedic family, Pushyamitra Shunga, it was continued with even greater zeal by tribes and clans which were but recent entrants to the Brahmanical social order. Among these were the Satavahanas, the Bharashiva-Nagas and others. Performance of the old Vedic ritual was perhaps the symbol of the Brahmanization of these new groups and their acceptance of Aryanization. The emergence of Brahmanism at this time, therefore, must be taken as an evidence of the expansion of Brahmanical society with the inclusion of groups that were then outside the pale of the old Aryan civilization.

The decline in the fortunes of Buddhism was brought about because of the operation of several factors. Among these the split between the Theravadins and the Mahayanists is certainly one. This began probably in the third century B.C. and by the

[6] *Rock Edict*, I, line 2.
[7] Nilakanta Sastri, K. A. (Ed.), *A Comprehensive History of India*, II, The Mauryas and Satavahanas, pp. 95-100.
[8] Majumdar and Altekar, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 37, 98. [9] *Ibid.*, pp. 65-76.

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first century B.C. Mahayanism spread practically all over northern India and under the patronage of the Kushana ruler, Kanishka (second century A.D.), began its expansion in Central Asia and farther afield. But in becoming an international faith Buddhism tended to lose out nationally as increasingly Brahmanism became identified with "nationalism". Fa-Hian the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim who travelled in India shortly after the passing away of Samudra Gupta notices this revival of Brahmanism. He bemoans the deserted and desolate condition of some of the most sacred sites associated with the life of the Buddha like Kapilavastu which he says was "like a great desert".[10] Already, then, by the beginning of the fifth century A.D. Buddhism had lost its dynamism as a great religious and social force and was getting more and more isolated in the monasteries which were supported by kings and other devotees who may not have been exclusive in their devotion to Buddhism.

II

The decline of Buddhism created a kind of an ideological and spiritual vacuum into which stepped Brahmanism and the cults associated with it. The Brahmanical revival assumed a two-fold aspect. On the one hand there was the revival of the old Vedic ritual evidence in the performance of rites, full of pomp and paegentry, like the horse sacrifice. These rites were especially welcome to the recent entrants to Brahmanical society like the Satavahanas, Nagas and others. On the other hand there was also beginning to emerge what later became well-known as Hinduism. This is the Puranic Hinduism whose establishment as the governing faith of millions came about during the Gupta age. This Hinduism bears the imprint of the influence of Buddhism and Jainism in several aspects. Temple-worship, probably an imitation of the Buddhist cult, became common; so also was the custom of going on pilgrimages. Puranic Hinduism worked out a synthesis of Upanishadic philosophy with popular religious ideas and ritual with the development of the philosophy of the *Margas* or paths to salvation which are described as three. Of these *jnyana marga* (path of knowledge) properly belongs to the Upanishadic tradi-

[10] Beal, S., *Op. Cit.*, I, p. 29.

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tion while the *Bhaktimarga* (path of devotion) is associated with the new cults of Vaishnavism and Shaivism. The third, *karmamarga* (path of duty) is an amalgam of survivals of the old Vedic ritual with the new cults of worship of the popular deities. Its social basis lay in the caste system which was still flexible enough to admit new tribal groups into the social structure by giving them a place in the hierarchy. Its basic philosophical tenets are expressed by the *Bhagvadgita* which emphasizes activity in the place of renunciation which played such an important part in Buddhism and Jainism. The Vedic sacrifices, however popular with royalty and the nobility, were outside the reach of the common people and even among the richer sections the performance of the Vedic ritual was more symbolical of a new social position than a religious conviction. For the common people the most favoured path was that of *bhakti* or devotion to the gods like Vishnu and Shiva.

III

The Gupta Age is the age of Vashnavism and Shaivism *par excellence*. Samudra Gupta was a devotee of Vishnu, his son and successor Chandra Gupta II proudly described himself as a *paramabhagavata,* Kumara Gupta I also delighted in the use of the same title and Skanda Gupta was a devotee of Shiva.[11] The history of the sect of the Vaishnavas goes back to a hoary antiquity. On archaeological evidence it is certain that by second century B.C. the sect was prominent and promising enough to attract a large number of votaries including some foreigners. The Besnagar Pillar Inscription of Heliodorus, an envoy of Antialcidas, the Ghosundi Stone slab and the Nanaghat inscriptions of the second century B.C. indicate the wide extension of the cult from Mathura to the Deccan.[12] The literary evidence, however, takes us much farther back into antiquity. The Sanskrit grammarian Patanjali who was a contemporary of Pushyamitra Shunga in his *Mahabhashya* (commentary on Panini's *Ashtadhyayi*), refers to the dramatic representations of Krishna and Kamsa.[13] The *Maha-*

[11] Majumdar and Altekar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 371.
[12] See *Z.D.M.G.*, 63 (1909), pp. 587-90; Chanda, *M.A.S.I.*, No. 5 (1919), pp. 163-5.
[13] Bhandarkar, Sir. R. G., *Vaishnavism and Shaivism*, p. 4.

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bharata, it is argued, was reduced to its present Krishnite form by 200 B.C. and the Heliodorus inscription clearly indicates that Vaishnavism had spread into the Punjab since Heliodorus must have become a Vaishnava even before his journey to Vidisha.[14] Kautilya's *Arthasastra* as well as the Pali *Niddesa* (commentary on the *Sutta Nipata*), contains references to the worship of Vasudeva and Samkarshana.[15] Panini (*circa* 400 B.C. ?) knows of the worship of Vasudeva and the *Chhandogya Upanishad* tells us about a Devakiputra Krishna who was a desciple of Ghora Angirasa.[16]

"The cult of Vasudeva," observes Sir R. G. Bhandarkar, "must have been formed from the same intellectual ferment as produced Buddhism and Jainism but it was a religious reform on more conservative principles. It repudiated slaughter of animals and inefficiency of the sacrificial ritual and advocated the path of devotion as the way of salvation. Like Buddhism and Jainism it was a natural reaction against the barren excesses of ritualism of the *Vedas.*"[17] Originally it was a Kshatriya movement professing the principles advocated by a Kshatriya warrior-philosopher. The new religion preached by Krishna was adopted by his tribe, the Yadavas, who lived in the Mathura region. In its initial stages it grew outside of Brahmanism but very soon Brahmanism made a common cause with it in its efforts to stem the tide of the spread of Buddhism. This association is indicated by the identification of Vasudeva-Krishna with the old Vedic deity Vishnu. As Edgerton points out, "Brahmanism stooped to conquer, it absorbed popular cults which it had not the strength to uproot. The simple and ancient device of identification of one god with another, furnished the means to this end."[18]

The founder of Bhagavatism, Vasudeva-Krishna, was a chieftain of the Vrishni sect of the Yadava clan.[19] Krishna was his personal name and Vasudeva his patronymic. He had a brother called Samkarshana. The Pali sources also refer to Baladeva as a brother of Krishna. Krishna preached a simple philosophy of

[14] Chanda, *Op. Cit.,* p. 157.
[15] Shamasastry, *Op. Cit.,* p. 432.
[16] Bhandarkar, *Op. Cit.,* pp. 9 ff.
[17] *Ibid.,* p. 7.
[18] Edgerton, F., *Bhagavadgita,* p. 33.
[19] See Raychoudhuri, H. C., *Materials for the Study of the Early Vaishnava Sect,* p. 19.

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devotion to Bhagavat, the Lord, by offering milk and grain sacrifices and leading a moral life. This simple cult preached by a Kshatriya appeared articularly acceptable to the general masses of people who found the Brahmanical Vedic ritual too expensive and artificial. It also came against the background of the metaphysical theories of the *Upanishads,* theories of *Brahman* and *Atman,* which though breath-taking in their sweep, were not easily comprehensible to the common people busy with everyday affairs. The cult of Vasudeva-Krishna, then spread rapidly and by the second century B.C. had numerous adherants in northern and central as well as western parts of India.

It was at this juncture that the identification of Krishna with Vishnu must have been brought about through the expedient of the theory of the *Avataras* or incarnations of God. From that point onwards the reformist cult came to be "Brahmanized" and the spirit of synthesis is best revealed in the theories of the *Bhagavadgita* which must have appeared in its first form at this time. During the succeeding centuries Bhagavatism or Vishnu-Krishnaism began to spread practically all over India as a cult of devotion (*Bhaktimarga*) and by the time the Guptas came on the scene it was already a flourishing religion with imperial followers.

IV

The other popular cult was that of the worship of Shiva. If the beginnings of Vaishnavism go back to the intellectual ferment of the Upanishadic period (*circa* 7th-6th centuries B.C.), Shaivism can claim a much greater antiquity. The evidence from the archaeological sites at Mohenjo Daro in Sind and Harappa in the Punjab (both now in Western Pakistan), indicates the cult of the worship of a male deity who is described as the proto-type of the historic Shiva.[20] On clay seals the god is represented as three-faced, sitting on a low-throne in the attitude of *Yoga* with legs bent double beneath him, heel to heel and toes turned downwards. He is also shown surrounded by four animals namely, a tiger, an elephant, a buffalo and a rhinoceros.[21] Here we have the representation of a deity that is later known as the *Mahayogi,* the *Pashupati* and the *Trimurti* which are names of Shiva. Shiva is

[20] Marshall, Sir John, *Mohenjo Daro and the Indus Civilization,* I. p. 52.
[21] See *Ibid.,* I, Plates XIII & XIV, p. 54.

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the great ascetic, the Lord of the Wild Beasts and the Three-in-One and must have formed a prominent part of the religion of the pre-Aryan civilization which is dated *circa* 2000 B.C.

The Aryans knew of a God who was called Rudra and had some aspects which were similar to those of the prehistoric Shiva. Rudra is the dread one who, when appeased, becomes the Benign One or Shiva. The *Vratyas* of the *Atharva Veda* seemed to have followed the practice of the worship of the deity called Shiva and the cult of phallic-worship.[22]

The Vedic Rudra, though a minor god is regarded with mixed feelings in the Vedic literature. He is a god of destruction and also is a kind and benevolent god.[23] His sons are the Maruts or the stormy winds and both the father and his sons are associated with death. Rudra is also described as Pashupa or Protector of Cattle.[24] Rudra is the Physician possessing the knowledge of healing remedies and is associated with a forest tribe called the Nishadas.[25] The underlying sentiment in this Brahmanical cult is that of fear which is also prominent in the systems of Rudra-Shaivism of later times.[26]

As in the case of Krishnaism the identification of the prehistoric deity with Rudra of the Vedic books must have been brought about as a natural process of a synthesis of two popular cults coming together under the stress of historical circumstances. Though the Vedic Aryans denounced the cults of the non-Aryans these cults could not be rooted out completely. On the other hand within the Vedic religion itself there were the two levels of religious belief and practice and one of these was the folk level reflected in the hymns of the *Atharva Veda*. The synthesis of Shiva and Rudra brought the cult within the framework of Brahmanism and facilitated its "Brahmanization".

In the Epic Age, if at all we can reasonably speak of such a distinct age in the history of India, Shiva emerges as a popular and powerful deity and is referred to on many occasions in the *Mahabharata*.[27] In the second century B.C. we see it emerge as a wide-spread cult mentioned as Shiva-Bhagavatas by Patanjali.[28]

[22] Bhandarkar, D. R., *Some Aspects of Ancient Indian Culture*, p. 15.
[23] See *Rig Veda*, VII, 46, 2. [24] *Ibid.*, I, 114, 9.
[25] Bhandarkar, R. G., *Vaishnavism, Shaivism*, p. 103.
[26] *Ibid.*, p. 106. [27] *Ibid.*, p. 114. [28] *Ibid.*, 115-16.

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These cultists carried an iron-lance which was the emblem of the God they worshipped. Shaivite incongraphy already seems to have been well established in the early centuries of the Christian era and numismatic evidence clearly shows the association of the bull with Shiva as also phallic emblems.[29] The extent to which the cult of Shiva had spread before the advent of the Guptas is shown by names like Shivadatta, Shivadasa and Shivapalita in the inscriptions of Barhut[30] and the fact that tribes like the Yaudheyas and Arjunayanas represented Shiva and his son Kartikeya as their titulary deities.[31] The coins of some of the Kushana rulers show their affiliation with the cult. Its spread, thus in north-western, northern and central parts of India is revealed by widely scattered numismatic evidence.[32]

From the second century B.C. to the fourth century A.D. we have thus evidence of the growth and spread of the cult of Shaivism and its influence on the Guptas is clearly shown by names of kings like Kumara and Skanda Gupta. Along with Vaishnavism, Shaivism had come to occupy a prominent position in the religious life of the period. This importance is shown by the prominence given to the story of the river Ganges issuing from the matted hair of Shiva (called Pashupati) and the representation of the eagle in the texts and representations in the inscriptions and coins of Samudra Gupta.

The worship of the Mother-Goddess was also another influential cult. Like Shaivism its roots lie deep in the prehistoric period. The evidence from the Indus sites reveals the existence of the practice of a Mother-Goddess who was regarded as a fertility deity as also one who protected children from disease. She is known in two aspects one of which is the benign aspect and the other malevolent. In the latter form the concept develops into that of Kali or Durga of later times. These cults play a prominent part in the religion of the *Puranas* which became formalized as the religion of the masses during the Gupta period.[33]

[29] See Allan, *Catalogue of Indian Coins, Ancient India,* pp. CXLII ff.
[30] *Epigraphia Indica,* II, pp. 95-6. [31] Allan, *Op. Cit.,* p. LXXXII.
[32] See Nilakanta Sastri, *A Comprehensive History of India,* II, The Mauryas and Satavahanas, p. 401.
[33] See Majumdar, R. C. and Pusalkar, A. D., *The History and Culture of the Indian People,* I, *The Vedic Age,* pp. 186-7.

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V

What was this *Puranic* religion to which we have referred? It is the system of religious beliefs and practices contained in the group of literature called the *Puranas* and which is the origin of present day Hinduism at the folk level. The term *Purana* means old or ancient or a record of past events. In this form it is almost synonymous with the term *itihasa* (history) and the two terms are often used together. But the *Puranas* as we have them contain much more besides historical narratives and some of them can scarcely be regarded as history. They deal with virtues like charity, religious observances, sacred places and rites in honour of the dead.[34] Tradition gives their number as eighteen major and an equal number of minor Puranas. The major *Puranas* are: Brahma, Padma, Vishnu, Vayu, Bhagavata, Naradiya, Markandeya, Agni, Bhavishya, Brahmavaivarta, Varaha, Linga, Skanda, Vamana, Kurma, Matsya, Garuda and Brahmanda. Though some of the materials incorporated in these texts are undoubtedly of an ancient date their compilation in their present form is dated in the fifth century A.D.[35]

The *Puranas* reflect the emergence of an ecclectic religion bound together by theism and a distinct philosophy of life. They try to synthesize the various developments of religious theories and concepts of deity as they grew through the centuries and their philosophical bases may thus be stated as belief in God (or gods), belief in soul (*atman*), belief in *Karma* and belief in rebirth. They accept the existence of numerous gods who are, however, brought into a certain vague monotheism through the enunciation of the theory of incarnations or *avataras*. These *avataras* are ten in number, namely Matsya (Fish), Kurma (Turtle), Varaha (Boar), Nrisimha (Man-Lion), Vamana (Dwarf), Parashurama (Rama with the Battle-Axe), Rama (the God-Hero of the epic *Ramayana*), Krishna, Buddha and Kalki (One who is yet to come to save the world).[36] This list is interesting as it reveals two salient facts of Indian religious history of the period. The first

[34] See Pusalkar, A. D., *Studies in Epics and Puranas of India*, p. XLV.
[35] See Hazra, R. C., *Studies in the Puranic Records of the Hindu Rites and Customs*, p. 6.
[36] For details on the history and interpretations of the *Avataras* see Gonda, J., *Aspects of Early Visnuism*, pp. 124 ff.

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one is that the cults of Rama and Krishna were already powerful and wide-spread and the other is that Buddhism was in the process of assimilation with Hinduism. God, according to the *Puranas,* is not only the creator but also the regulator of the universe; and in some versions also the destroyer. He is the all-powerful, kind and just and salvation is impossible without His grace. It is not necessary to use the intermediary agency of a priest to worship Him though in certain aspects of ritual worship the help of the priesthood is essential. What is necessary, above all, is *bhakti* or selfless devotion to God and a life characterized by morality and spiritual earnestness. There is no single path that leads one to God. In fact there are three paths which are described as *Karmamarga, bhaktimarga* and *jnyanamarga.* The first is the path of duty and ritual, the second is the way of devotion and the last is the path of knowledge. The philosophy of the three paths is based on the assumption that though the quest for liberation is open to all, all men are not alike in their intellectual and emotional capabilities and aptitudes. The most difficult is the path of knowledge and the easiest is the path of duty and ritual. For a man of true knowledge ritual is superfluous but for an ordinary man it is the beginning of selfless devotion to God.

The basis of religious life is mortality which assumes numerous forms related as it is with duties and obligations of various kinds. Morality is also the way to perfection and true morality and true devotion and knowledge are inseparable. Morality is thought of on two distinct levels. What may currently be regarded as a matter of social and familial relations is also included in morality. Obedience to elders, harmony in the family, co-operation in social relations within the village community, all these are aspects of the more general societal relations which in the thought of the *Puranas* is backed by religious sanctions and exhortations. The central idea in all this thinking is that of *dharma* which broadly means nature, custom, morality, obligation and duty in general. The *Mahabharata* described *dharmas* as having been ordained by the Creator for the advancement and growth of all creatures; it is also the eternal moral order on which is based the cosmic archetypal ideation persisting through all mutations and independent of human preferences.[37]

[37] See Sukthankar, V. S., *On the Meaning of the Mahabharata,* pp. 80-2.

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It was also at this time that the philosophy of the four ideals of life was formally presented and became established as a basis of Hindu religious and social thinking. These four ideals of life are *dharma, artha, kama* and *moksha*. We have already briefly noted the meaning of the term *dharma*. *Dharma* as a calculus of duties and responsibilities is related to social groups (*varnadharma*), ethical and spiritual striving in an individual's life (*ashramadharma*), families (*kuladharma*), regions (*deshadharma*), time (*yugadharma*), humanity (*manavadharma*) and the state (*rajadharma*). It is thus a comprehensive doctrine of duties and privileges ensuing from the proper discharge of one's own obligations.

Artha means wealth, economic well-being, productivity and prosperity. The ideal of *artha* defines a human being as an economic entity with obligations to be a productive unit contributing to the economic well-being and prosperity of society at large. In this capacity man has to play his own economic role in society for the enrichment of his family and society and in this respect the ideal of *artha* expresses the positive (*pravritti*) aspect of the Puranic view of life. *Kama* is pleasure in general but also means the obligation to fulfil biological needs of the race by continuing the family line and living life in all its variety and fulness. Along with *artha* it forms a part of the philosophy of living life. Finally comes *Moksha* which is salvation or liberation of the spirit for the sake of which all life must be, in the ultimate sense, lived and all striving directed towards it. The *margas* or paths are related to the philosophy of salvation and *dharma* and *moksha* constitute the other aspect, the aspect of withdrawal (*nivritti*), of the Puranic philosophy of life. *Moksha* stands for man's quest for transcendence and perfection and is appropriately described as the final and supreme goal of life.[38] But if *Moksha* or liberation was the ultimate ideal life for the average person *swarga* or heaven was the more immediate objective to be reached after death. Samudra Gupta's inscription and coins refer to heaven,[39] as the abode of Indra, Dhanada and Daruna and in this must be seen the survival of the old Vedic concept of heaven now reiterated by the Puranic religion. In the Vedic literature the souls of the departed ones who

[38] See Pusalkar, A. D., *Op. Cit.*, pp. LXII-LXIII.

[39] See *Allahabad Pillar Inscription*, line 29; Majumdar and Altekar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 157.

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were virtuous in their earthly life are described as living in heaven in the company of Yama (the Allahabad Pillar Inscription refers to Antaka, another name of Yama), in a world where every earthly pleasure exists in a much more exalted and heightened form. Life in heaven is long and pleasant and beings living in it are to become like the gods.[40] It is interesting to recall here that Samudra Gupta is also likened to a god by his court-poet indicating the strong survivals of the Vedic tradition now fused with the Puranic thought during the fourth century A.D. The path to heaven comprises acts of devotion to the gods, their ritual worship, charity, compassion and other moral acts. It also means performance of the ceremonies ordained for man as described in the *sastras* or ritual handbooks.

The Gupta Age is also the age of the development of Indian mythology. The works of Kalidasa, ascribed by many to this age, abound in mythological references and many of the *Puranas* too dwell at length on the mythological acts of gods and men. These mythologies, as D. P. Mukerji points out, are the "horizontal co-ordinate indices of history."[41] They embody the recurrent pattern in the development of the age, play the role of "ideas-in-action" and function as "value-structures".[42] They form the vital link between the eternal past with the evanescent present and lend permanence to what must necessarily be a fleeting procession of ideas and events. The references to these myths in the inscriptions and coins of Samudra Gupta reveal this phase of Indian thinking of his age, at once charming, full of vitality and richness.

The religion of Samudra Gupta, then, marks an important phase in the history of Hinduism. In it is seen a synthesis of the old Vedic phase, remote, complex and hierarchical, with the living faith of the common people characterized by immediacy, earnestness and a simplicity of belief and concepts. Action, faith and discursive thought blend in it to form a composite whole providing not only a comprehensive world-view but also a working philosophy of everyday life. Samudra Gupta, in this context, emerges from the phrases of his inscriptions on stone and coins as a man of deep and unshakable faith who found immortal, spiritual significance in the everyday acts of his fleeting life. For him the mean-

[40] Radhakrishnan, S., *Indian Philosophy*, I, pp. 114-15.
[41] *On Indian History*, p. 65.
[42] See Mukerji, Radhakamal, *The Culture and Art of India*, p. 35.

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ing and purpose of his life were so definite as to bring Heaven within his certain grasp not so much because he was a great king but a human being living in the constant sight of his gods and performing acts of valour, charity, compassion and nobility.

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Epilogue

IN THE preceding pages an attempt was made to unfold the chronicle of the life and times of one of the most outstanding personalities of the history of ancient India. Samudra Gupta lived his earthly life for about three score years and a little over. His reign, however, ushered in a whole new age. In this brief period he fought numerous wars. The triumph of his armies left an impress practically in all corners of India and the list of kings overthrown, "exterminated" and subjugated by him is impressive indeed. His wars made him a great emperor ruling over a vast stretch of territory and created out of a small patrimony a great empire. Large areas of India began to know under his vigorous rule the benefits of security and prosperity.

But Samudra Gupta was not a mere annexationist. His personality was many-sided. The poetic description that his most charming body was covered with hundreds of scars of wounds received on the field of battle reveals but one aspect of it. He had the rare distinction of combining within a single life-time the sensitivity of a poetical tradition with a martial ardour which burst forth resounding over many battlefields scattered across the country. In him poetry and plenty resided together in serenity and happiness and the vitality of the Indian cultural tradition expressed itself in a new age. In a sense Samudra Gupta reflects the most salient elements comprising the Indian conception of the Hero. His arms were muscular and strong enough to wield irresistibly the "battle-axe of death" but his fingertips were subtle and pliant enough to delicately pluck the strings of the *Vina* and create mellifluous music. His mind was agile and comprehended the most complicated battle-plans; at the same time it was alert enough to enjoy subtle metaphysical discussions. In him there was the flowering of the Indian genius, at once, active, idealistic, determined and irresistible. He conquered many kings and bestowed his generosity on many. To his *dharma* he was dedicated and in him some of the finest virtues of the Indian ethical tradition found an eloquent

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expression. His charity, compassion, liberality and sympathy excited the imagination of his contemporaries in describing him as a veritable divinity walking this earth of ours. In his case the flights of poetic fancy assume an air of verisimilitude. Learned, possessed of imagination, an ear for music and a mind for abstruse thought Samudra Gupta lived, fought and thought in the best traditions of the creative spirit of ancient India. If his Allahabad Pillar Inscription is the testament of his faith, his fine coins are mementoes of the destiny of Classical India.

Where does he stand in the galaxy of heroes and rulers of ancient India? His history is preserved in no more than fifty lines of texts in inscriptional records and numismatic epigrams. The literature of classical India has passed him by with perhaps only an oblique mention. But he lives in his deeds which made of a princely dream an imperial reality. In him the two traditions of ancient Indian culture converge for the priestly-hierarchic and the folk traditions lose their separate identity and become one broad cultural stream. It is only at the point of such a confluence that Indian culture manifests its greatest creativity and the significance of a Samudra Gupta lies precisely in this ability to bring two divergent currents together. War and music, philosophy and poetry, wealth and compassion no longer are separated by barriers of time and space but fuse to form an image of greatness that does not repeat itself in the panorama of human history. Samudra Gupta stands at the threshold of a new age and as the creator of such a new age, his place in the annals of ancient India is high and secure.

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APPENDIX

Rama Gupta

THE OFFICIAL geneologies of the Guptas mention Chandra Gupta II as the immediate successor Samudra Gupta. The earliest known date of Chandra Gupta's reign is 380 A.D. as indicated by the Mathura Inscription. It has been generally assumed that we know of only one son of Samudra Gupta. This assumption has been challenged by the story of a Rama Gupta reconstructed on the basis of literary evidence. In a dramatic work called *Devi-Chandra Gupta* by Vishakhadatta the main plot revolves round the life and activities of a Rama Gupta. Scattered notices of Rama Gupta are also available in works like the *Natyadarpana* and the *Shringaraprakasha* and echoes of the story are contained in inscriptional references and works like the *Majmal-ut-tawarikh*.

Briefly told the story wants us to believe that the immediate successor of the great Samudra Gupta was his son named Rama Gupta. In contrast to his illustrious father, Rama Gupta was a weak and "boneless wonder". His kingdom was invaded by the Sakas and, when cornered in a dangerous situation, he agreed to save his own life by letting his queen Dhruvadevi go into the harem of the Saka aggressor. To this his brother Chandra Gupta could not submit. He, therefore, thought of a stratagem. He dressed himself in the guise of the queen Dhruvadevi and went to the court of the Saka king where he assassinated the invader and saved the honour of the Gupta family. On his return he was naturally hailed as a liberator. He later killed his brother Rama Gupta and married the widow, Dhruvadevi.

The story contains two names whose historicity rests on firm foundations of evidence from inscriptions and coins. We know that Chandra Gupta II was the successor of Samudra Gupta and that one of his queens was Dhruvadevi. So far there has been not a single mention of Rama Gupta in the official Gupta inscriptions; nor are his coins yet found anywhere if any such coinage existed at all. The silence of the inscriptions can be easily understood for the official records would understandably avoid a reference to the disgraceful acts of a Gupta monarch if such a one ruled

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at all. Earlier in the work we have referred to the Kacha Gupta problem and found that there is no mention of a Kacha Gupta in any Gupta inscription though, on known evidence, we cannot accuse him of any action as ignoble as that of Rama Gupta. The absence of coins is a more serious matter in our acceptance of the Rama Gupta story. Again, it is rather difficult to believe that the Sakas were so powerful at that time to menace the Gupta Empire. Their power was liquidated by Chandra Gupta by 409 A.D. when the Saka coinage was replaced by that of the Guptas in Western India where the Saka power held out the longest. But this argument is not decisive since it may be assumed that though declining rapidly the Sakas mustered strength, for a brief while, in a measure capable of seriously threatening parts of the Gupta Empire. The murder of a brother and marriage to the widow may be shocking incidents but they are not inherently improbable. The inscriptional echoes of the story come from the 9th-10th centuries A.D.

This much seems to be fairly certain and that is that a story revolving round the ignominous defeat of a king called Rama Gupta and the resourceful action of his brother Chandra Gupta leading to the safeguarding of the family honour was current in the 6th century A.D. Whether this story related to characters from the well-known Gupta family or some other is not precisely known. It is also possible to argue that the drama is full of romantic and fictitious material and as such its claim to be treated as serious historical evidence is jeopardized. As it stands it is difficult to accept the Rama Gupta story. Rama Gupta stands as a fictional figure and can be rescued from that world only if we have inscriptional and numismatic evidence in his favour. We must suspend our judgement on him until such evidence is found.

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